



Summary

A Design Experiment

IMAGINING ALTERNATIVE HUMANITARIAN ACTION

This document reflects a six-month project to reimagine humanitarian action using design thinking. It is part of a two-year research initiative, 'Constructive Deconstruction', led by the Humanitarian Policy Group at the Overseas Development Institute aimed at reimaging humanitarian action.

Read the full document at
odi.org/imaging-alternative-humanitarian-action

Welcome

Dear Colleagues,

When the Overseas Development Institute's Humanitarian Policy Group launched Constructive Deconstruction, a two-year research project to reimagine the humanitarian system, it was a project borne of frustration and promise in equal parts. Frustration that – despite significant changes in the nature of crises, the tactics of war and the profile of aid workers; despite big money, big data and the industry growth that it generated – in its fundamentals, the international humanitarian system had changed very little since the end of the Cold War, when many of the institutions we now know came of age.

But in developing this research, we also found promise. Promise that these frustrations were shared by humanitarian practitioners and senior aid officials, host and donor governments and even the humanitarian stalwarts. All were finding it more difficult to do their jobs and live up to public and personal expectations amidst stagnant funding, political indifference and declining public support. In its run-up and its follow-up, the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) amplified these concerns and generated momentum for change. And increasingly, people living in and around crises had the ambition, the tools and the critical mass to be pro-active responders and change agents on their own behalf.

The international humanitarian system needed a rethink, and we felt that that this project could help catalyse that process. Even the name, Constructive Deconstruction, was intended to suggest that reimagining the humanitarian system required dismantling what currently exists – at least intellectually – and challenging the values, assumptions and incentives that underpin humanitarian action today.

For such an ambitious task, we didn't want to employ the usual analytical tools – decades of traditional analysis of the sector's flaws had not got us far enough. And in light of perennial hollow commitments to 'put people at the centre' and be accountable to affected populations, we thought that Design Thinking, an approach that prioritises 'end users', was a good place to start.

Design Thinking is a collaborative tool that uses human experience to develop solutions to complex problems. It's been around for about 20 years, used by governments, businesses and academics to bring empathy into product, service and systems design. Design Thinking is creative more so than theoretical, employs human connection, more so than statistics, and while based on principles of product and systems design, it's focused on user journeys and experiences.

Once we settled on Design Thinking as our approach, we brought in ThinkPlace, an established design firm with a community-minded ethos and global reach, to help us. We convened a group of experienced humanitarian practitioners, refugees and other recipients of aid alongside people from the private sector, finance, academia and the media – some of them disruptors, all of them 'change agents' – as our co-designers. Soon after that our discomfort began.

Change? Why bother? These questions came up all too frequently in our discussions. Change is too hard and not within our power. The change required is all about politics and what power did we have to influence politics or government interests? Was there any point in refitting a system that had become too big to be dismantled, and that is so contextual, complex and ungovernable that it can't be designed at all? Well, perhaps. But we took all that in as part of our challenge and put our trust in the design process in the hope that its user focus would unearth some new ideas, or at least bring new sheen to rusty conversations.

So with all of that, we introduce Constructive Deconstruction: A design experiment to re-imagine the humanitarian system.



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Cover image credit: Harryarts/Freepick.com

a different approach

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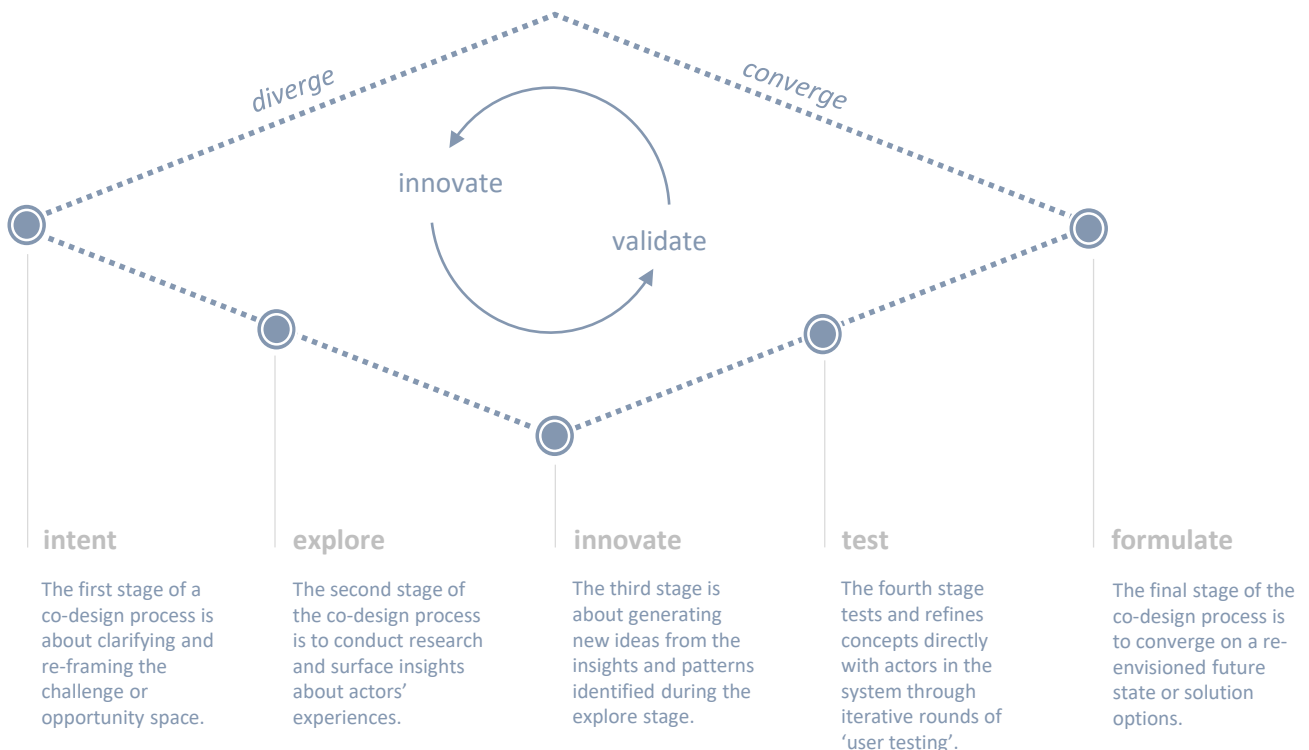
Standard attempts to reform the humanitarian sector tend to see change as a linear process of tweaking rational institutions. Instead, the participants of this design experiment took a different approach that sought to understand the attitudes, experience and expectations of the people that use the sector as a starting point to reimagine humanitarian action. This section summarises this methodology, beginning with the principles of design thinking upon which this approach is based.

Why design thinking?

Design Thinking refers to the strategies designers use during the process of designing. The notion of design as a "way of thinking" can be traced to Herbert A. Simon's 1969 book: *The Sciences of the Artificial*. Design thinking differs from traditional scientific and hypothesis-led problem solving in that it investigates both known and ambiguous aspects of a current situation through immersion in, empathy with, and discovery of latent human patterns which then lead to novel solution sets.

Co-design is an approach that upholds the value that who we design *for* should be who we are designing *with*. It is particularly suited to design in the context of complex systems where there are many different and often competing perspectives that must be integrated into a design or solutions set. While engaging in a co-design process is not always linear, it is a rigorous yet creative method for problem-solving.

Taking a co-design approach on this project started with building a shared understanding of the intent or vision (the change we seek to make), leading to a process of rapid exploration and divergence as we explored, innovated, and tested until we finally converge to formulate the future vision. Through these cycles, it was best to work in rapid iterations that were responsive and adaptive to user and stakeholder inputs.



Design inquiry

What would humanitarian action look like if it were re-imagined based on lived, human experiences? The primary aim for our design consultations was to explore just that. The specific aims were to:

1. Surface situated stories and narratives about people's touchpoints

with the formal humanitarian architecture, framing those experiences in their own words, and designing preferred future scenarios from a place of deep empathy with them.

2. Identify 'extreme cases' and cases of 'positive deviance'

where people interacting with the formal humanitarian architecture share the ways they 'work-around' the barriers they encounter.

3. Provide a deliberate and safe space to co-design

preferred future experiences WITH people who interact with the formal humanitarian architecture, rather than FOR or TO them.

The challenges with the existing formal international humanitarian architecture have been well-documented. This design activity was not aimed at producing new knowledge about the established problem space, but rather, it is about framing both challenges and opportunities, barriers and enablers in a human-centred way and through the words and imagination of people who are experiencing them.

The following summarises the line of questioning for this design inquiry. These are not the actual questions posed to people during consultations. Questions were framed in ways that invited stories and reflections about people's lived experiences with the humanitarian system. People's stories and reflections served as the springboard to ideas about alternative humanitarian futures with them.

power

What needs to happen to enable more shared power and resources among a diversity of actors?

What perverse institutional incentives exist that maintain the status quo?

What are possible, alternative incentive options?

experience

What are the experience pathways of people through the humanitarian architecture?

How do people affected by crisis see their own roles?

What structures in place limit or enable the roles people have for themselves?

accountability

How do people affected by crisis want others to be held to account?

Why do some actors feel powerless about being accountable to people affected by crisis?

How should systems of representation exist?

agility

What are the blockages to furthering already-made commitments to change?

How can the sector be better equipped or ready for change?

When is more flexibility needed and when is more rigidity needed?

diversity

How do different actors propel or compromise each other's work?

What have self-organising actors been able to do that traditional actors haven't?

What different types of working relationships are needed?

Who participated?

12

Core
Design Team
members

A set of 12 Core Design Team (CDT) members steered the design process. The CDT was comprised of former practitioners, former UN representatives, informed observers, experts in humanitarian financing, conflict, resilience and change. We convened six co-design workshops with the CDT over the six month period.

23

Participant
locations
and reach

Desiring a truly global reach to this project, we operated out of three hubs of humanitarian thought leadership and practice. We had research and design teams in North America, East Africa, and Europe that extended out to conduct research and design activities in 23 locations around the world (including but not limited to Syria, Turkey, Kenya, and Greece).

75

Participants in
discovery
research

To diagnose the challenges of the sector from a deeply human perspective, we conducted exploratory and semi-structured interviews with a number of people across various scales and functions in the sector. This research was conducted across 16 distinct locations and 73 different organisations.

50

Participants in
co-design
workshops

To diverge and explore and generate as many ideas as possible before beginning to converge or focus on any given set of solutions. We did this by convening a wide range of people for a two-day 'Insights and Ideation' workshop on 3-4 May, 2017. Attendees included government officials, funders, technologists, private sector disruptors, international NGOs, local/national NGOs/CBOs, volunteers, researchers, policy-makers, host community representatives, refugees and others who are displacement-affected.

20

Participants in
user testing
and
refinement

In order to test and refine the assumptions and principles underpinning the shortlisted ideas, we conducted user testing with a variety of people 'inside of' and 'outside of' the international humanitarian system. We not only tested concepts through interactive workshops, but also through comparative analysis (one-on-one interviews with people who are engaged in 'real-world' applications of concepts similar to the ones developed through this process). In total, our testing engaged 31 people across several protracted crisis contexts from 25 distinct organisations.

5

Operating
languages

The research and testing portions of this project were conducted across the following five languages: English, Arabic (Lebanese), French (West African), Swahili (Kenyan) and Greek.

current state

2

Contemporary humanitarian action has been accused of being inflexible. Based on this, the design team broke down the sector's key problems into 10 'pathologies' based on interviews with 73 system 'users'. Next, the core design team narrowed the design focus to the types of crises where these pathologies are most acute: response to protracted crises driven by conflict and displacement. From there, the team could identify an overarching design question.

The current state pathologies

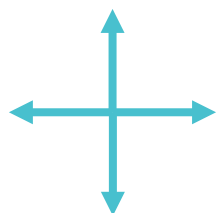
The core design team identified key 'systemic' pathologies. This was achieved through exploratory interviews with 75 'users', including recipients, practitioners and experts across 16 locations and 73 organisations, as well as an extensive literature review.

system-centred
inward-looking



- 1 Forgetting the human in humanitarian
- 2 Denying the hypocrisy of humanitarian principles
- 3 Institutionalising self-interest and dysfunction
- 4 Lacking shared vision and governance
- 5 Contravening data and evidence
- 6 Dismissing alternative assistance channels

people-centred
outward-looking













- 7 Misaligning response to what is actually needed
- 8 Undermining local civil society and government
- 9 Habituating short-term and parallel arrangements
- 10 Neglecting dignity, agency and self-reliance

The design question

How might international humanitarian action become **adaptable and accountable** in ways that recognise people affected by crisis as the **agents of change** in their own lives?

The design focus

TYPE	 Conflict / Displacement	 Natural disaster	 Human-made environmental	 Biological outbreak
CYCLE	 Prevention	 Preparedness	 Response	 Recovery
DURATION	 Sudden onset	 Protracted		

people and their experiences

3

An important step in any design process is situating the proposed changes within the lived experiences of key system ‘users’, including people working in the ‘system’ and those affected by crises. The design team collected these stories, attitudes, concerns and ambitions and plotted them on experience maps. Such tools help guide the design process through identifying key points in their interactions with the sector where reform could have a large, positive impact.

Mapping user experiences

User experience maps allow us to walk in users' shoes by traveling with them as they interact with a service/organisation/system. Experience maps display not only a person's touchpoints with the system, but also their thoughts and feelings about that experience. This opens up a design space for us to consider how to re-imagine those touchpoints, and re-design them as the leverage points for change – rather than a whole of system, top-down re-design. By revealing the leverage points in the system, these experience maps also helped us to identify the key enablers, as well as key barriers which stand in the way of users achieving their objectives. From a creative perspective, these barriers and enablers become opportunity spaces for design.

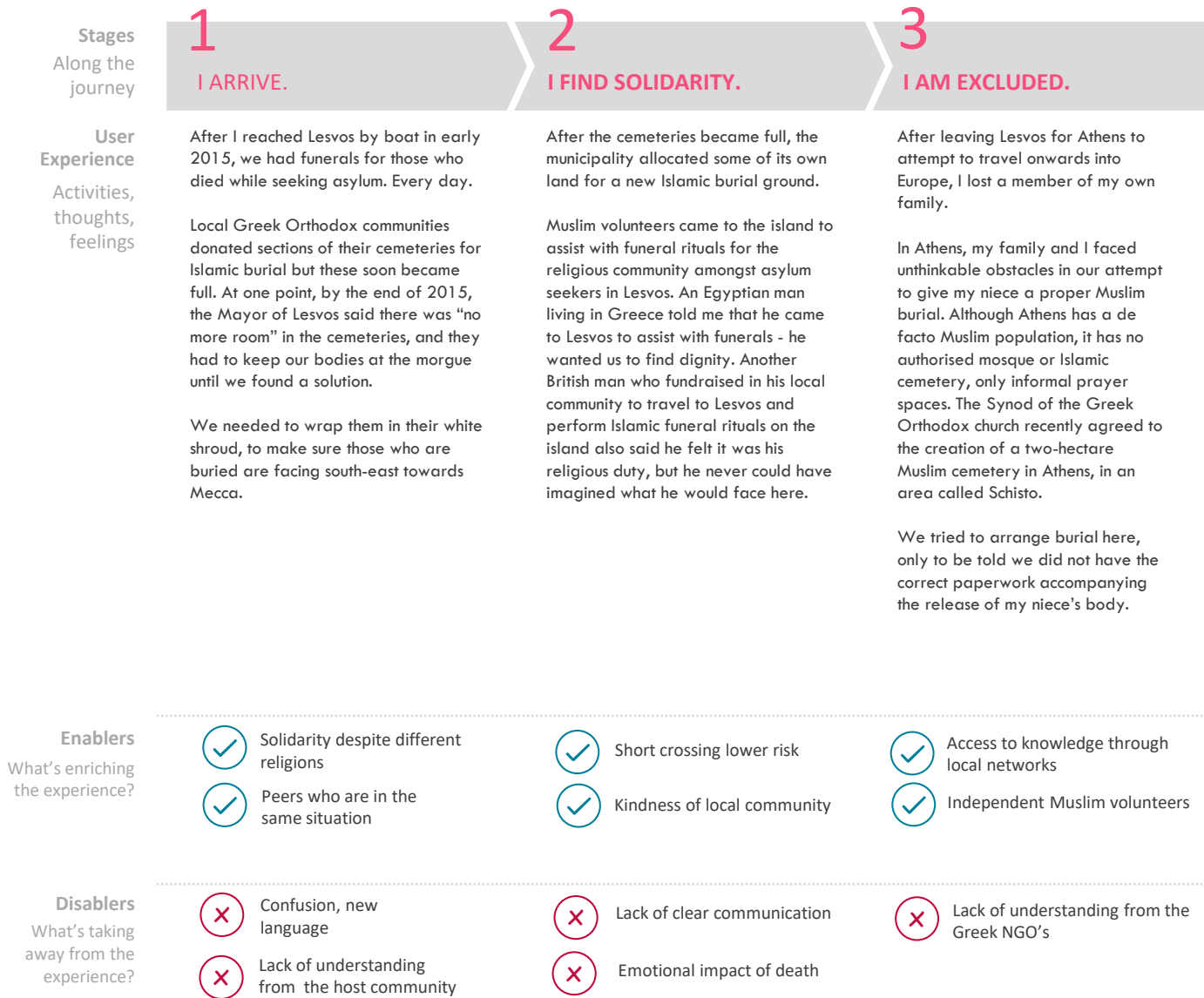
The following pages display snapshots (abbreviated versions) of 11 experience maps – rich human stories – which were documented from exploratory research with system actors. They are presented in raw 'first-person' verbatim form, to give the reader the opportunity to empathise with and embed themselves in that user's thinking and actions. These stories are annotated through 'barriers' and 'enablers' which were posted up by participants of the co-design workshops.

A list of the experience maps on the following pages are:

- EXPERIENCE MAP 1 **A billion workshops, just because** LOCAL NGO, SYRIA
- EXPERIENCE MAP 2 **Obsessed with their own bureaucracy** SYRIAN ADVOCATE, TURKEY
- EXPERIENCE MAP 3 **Holding down the fort, without power** UN NATIONAL, YEMEN
- EXPERIENCE MAP 4 **I am African like they are African** REFUGEE, DRC
- EXPERIENCE MAP 5 **Any press is bad press** REFUGEES, KAKUMA CAMP, KENYA
- EXPERIENCE MAP 6 **There's no room for us in life, or in death** REFUGEE, GREECE
- EXPERIENCE MAP 7 **Divide and disempower** HOST MUNICIPALITY MAYOR, LEBANON
- EXPERIENCE MAP 8 **Cash: cure or curse?** PROGRESSIVE FUNDER
- EXPERIENCE MAP 9 **Contract compliance or saving lives?** LOCAL NGO, MYANMAR
- EXPERIENCE MAP 10 **Not all law is good, obviously** INGO FRONTLINE STAFF, IRAQ
- EXPERIENCE MAP 11 **Being called a liar in public** LOCAL NGO, SOMALIA
- EXPERIENCE MAP 12 **If you don't kill yourself, you are killed already** PALESTINIAN REFUGEE, UK

Example: EXPERIENCE MAP 6

There's no room for us in life, or in death REFUGEE, GREECE



4

I FEEL VALUED.

Our only option was to take her north to the region of the Greek Muslim minority in Western Thrace, where there is a mosque and Muslim cemetery, or else attempt to return her body to Syria. Both options are expensive and out of our reach.

A small faith-based organisation heard about our situation and they arranged and accompanied us on the long drive with her body to the Muslim cemetery in Kamutini, 800km away. They also assisted with the bureaucratic costs that accompany death here in Greece.

It took us days to be able to bury my niece, which was difficult to bear, considering our custom is to bury our loved ones as soon as possible. It touched me to share such an intense moment of grief with those of another faith, who afforded us great compassion in our time of need. No other organisation provided support to us at this time.

5

I ADVOCATE.

The organisation told me they want to undertake advocacy for our situation. After their experience with my family, they feel compelled to highlight the injustice we have had to bear.

I found out that this treatment of those who die at borders is not limited to Greece. Most governments across Europe do not even bother to count our deaths.

People talk of human rights in Europe, but where is our right to dignity and to freedom from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, where is the respect for our right to family life and to the physical and moral integrity of those left behind.

6

I WORK AROUND.

A group of refugees I know living informally in Athens decided that we needed to consider alternatives. We pooled our money and bought farm land, where we have allocated a section to be used as a cemetery for people on the move like us to bury their loved ones according to our religious customs. We are waiting to receive a child who died recently on one of the islands. We did not obtain any kind of official consent to go ahead with our plan, but we will deal with it as it happens.

My personal experience has shown me the need for stronger measures to address the rights and the treatment of those asylum seekers who die on the move, and of their relatives and loved ones, not only within the EU, but worldwide.

To be heard/to have someone speak for me

We have empathy

Regulations to set up cemetery

Inter-race Solidarity

Pooled money to solve problem

People of faith in host communities

Recognize need for global initiative

Unidentified treatment

Lack of Muslim population and experience

Municipality not providing land

Strict religious doctrines from the Muslim community

Double standards

Gender specifics on burial rituals e.g. washing female bodies in preparation for burial.

Limited standards of humanitarian agencies

Example: EXPERIENCE MAP 8

Cash: cure or curse? PROGRESSIVE FUNDER

Stages
Along the
journey

1

I AM SO PERPLEXED.

2

I SEE ALTERNATIVES.

3

I QUESTION OUR ROLE.

User
Experience

Activities,
thoughts,
feelings

We're fed up of doing the same thing again and again. Why year after year do we keep on putting huge amounts of money into a system that is not fit for purpose?

Last year was a big year for humanitarian reform, with the World Humanitarian Summit and the Grand Bargain and all that, then 2017 should really be putting it all into practice. That's how I see it.

I have heard of other donors who have been experimenting with cash. They say they it is the antidote to us trying and trying and failing and failing with all this other stuff.

In countries where the bank system is fine, where food is accessible everywhere, places like this have all the ingredients for refugees to actually be given cash and for them to decide how to use their money, it's very simple.

If you ask refugees if they want vouchers or cash, they say: "cash, because I don't want to have to travel five kilometres away just to get my food from a specially WFP designated shop and travel all the way back with it when I can go walk five minutes down the road and get food there, which is half the price and still the same quality, so please just give me cash so I can decide how I want to support my family."

But then as a donor, how do we best support this? Do we just continue to give our taxpayer money to the UN agencies to do this cash thing?

Other donors say this is inefficient. If you look at the bigger cash actors in the humanitarian space, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, etc, they are all processing independent cash streams into one card for a household.

That's four agencies all doing it, all with their overheads, their offices, their staff costs, their vehicles – and the question is why not just one of them? Why not streamline? Why does there need to be duplication in the system?

Enablers

What's enriching
the experience?



Cash distribution expands choice



Vouchers remove human agency and individuality



One focal point for cash

Disablers

What's taking
away from the
experience?



Perverse incentives unclear process of accountability



Lack of good research/data



No personal incentive to change or adapt



Feeling frustrated at the systemic/institutional blockages in the UN

4

I WITNESS OTHERS.

I guess these questions being raised by other donors are important ones. There are very few donors who are willing to challenge the UN, and for those who are trying to reform and challenge the UN structures, they really struggle. The UN has an army to defend its turf and it is very good at beating donors and NGOs into submission – for those of us who step out of line – there are consequences. I've seen this happen with other donors.

Other donors ask questions, the UN reaction to them is: "but why are you asking for more transparency, why do you want to have all this data?" These other donors have decided to challenge the UN anyway to find a more efficient way to do cash. Apparently, this new governance structure is more inclusive of civil society and beneficiaries as well. I like the sound of that.

5

I INVESTIGATE THE TRUTH.

For some reason, the UN rarely shows its donors how much it costs to run their cash transfer program, they refuse to show the transparency of their budgets. All they say is that they are able to deliver 91/100 cents to the beneficiary, but then, when you look at the budget, the numbers don't add up that way.

One thing we hear the UN always say is: we want to serve as many people as possible in the best way possible, to make sure the beneficiaries are right at the centre. But their actions are louder than their words, we can see with this cash case that in actual fact the beneficiaries are not at the centre, it's the sector, it's the agencies' self-interest at the centre.

I am shocked at how so-called humanitarian agencies are working to stop reform from taking place.

6

I TRY TO REMAIN TRUE.

There's political backlash towards those donors who challenge the system. It makes me angry that those who are brave enough to do something different get punished and sidelined.

I can see that the current system is so out of date. We are using emergency response approaches for protracted conflicts, and it's outrageous. There is a lot of money going to the Syria crisis, which is in its 7th year, but there is going to be a point where this money will stop. My worry is that as donors, we will get challenged: "Why did you not do more to force the UN agencies to work better, cut out the hypocrisy, bureaucracy, the lack of transparency, bring in greater accountability, and show that our taxpayer money is going to support as many people affected by the crisis as possible, why did you not do that?" This is what I am worried about in the long term.



New technology has created new opportunities



Access to others doing similar work



Cash is seen as a panacea – but only works in certain contexts!



There should be allowance to deviate from plans based on reality



I fear repercussions for speaking out about problems

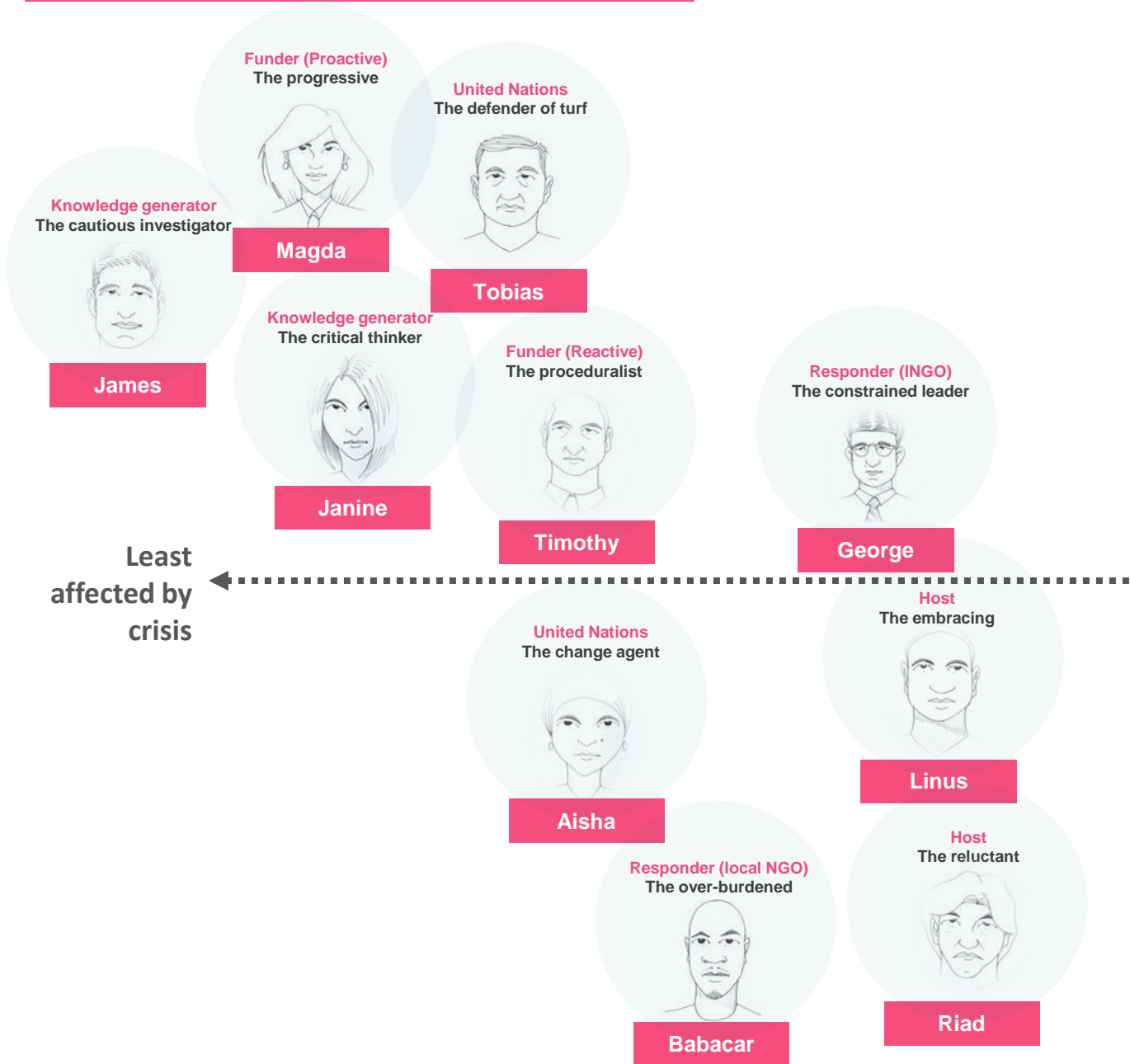


Lack of transparency



Frustrations at lack of space and opportunity to innovate in any effective way

Personifying the actors



High degree of influence
for change

Responder (INGO)
The risk-taker



Jose

Most affected
by crisis

Affected by crisis
The self-reliant



Zahaar

Affected by crisis
The system-reliant



Sifa

Affected by crisis
The under-served



Mahamadou

Low degree of influence
for change

future state

4

Based on the experience maps of systems' uses, the design team developed a 'future state': a broad vision of how the interests of people affected by humanitarian crises could be placed at the forefront of the way the sector operates. This is presented as a future experience map, illustrating what a more desirable 'journey' for both system actors and people affected by crisis might look like. The development of future response 'modes' suggests how the sector might take on different approaches to respond to these identified needs.

Future state vision



For people affected by crisis

In a crisis that creates significant humanitarian needs, every person affected has access to basic services, safety, and opportunity, with the capacity to absorb shocks, and the agency to shape her/his future.



For the system

A system that **adapts** to address the self-determined needs of people affected by crisis; is built upon recognising the **agency** of people, communities and states; and which can be held **accountable** to people for its failings.

Future state experience

No one experiences the whole system: we experience pathways through it.

Dr Richard Buchanan, "Managing as Designing" 2004

We did not look to redesign the entire system from the top down. Instead, our design activity began at the human interaction level. At this level, the user is pulled (rather than pushed) to 'touch' and interact with parts of the system according to his/her needs, preferences, motivators, and values. Different human pathways through a system provide insight into the multitude of different touchpoints and interaction points that could be leverage points for transformative change at the experience layer.

The 'future experience pathway' on the following pages visually represents an archetypal human journey. In reality, people's experiences are obviously much messier, more non-linear, and less comprehensive.

The pathway outlines key user needs that international humanitarian actors could use as starting points to respond to effectively, needs such as resilience, protection, assistance, a sense of community, a future and self-reliance. These needs can be met through many various touchpoints by many various channels. It also visually demonstrates through the blue box that people affected by crisis are agents of change in their own lives and this should be taken into account across crisis preparedness, response and recovery actions by the formal system. It also depicts that primary accountability of response efforts should be to people affected, and at the same time, still maintain transparency and efficiency for funders.

This depiction aims to reinforce a starting point that is rooted in (as much as can be) desirable user experience as they interact with alternative humanitarian action.

We have AGENCY



We determine our needs, tell our own stories, and shape our own futures.



We surrender control and let go of our decision-making power.

We are RESILIENT

As persons affected by protracted crises...



We have the capacity to deal with the impact ourselves.



We prioritise efforts and resources towards both preparedness and response elsewhere.



As the international aid system responding to people affected by protracted crises...

We have PROTECTION



We all need quick and safe pathways out of life-threatening danger.



We take action to protect people from danger – while prioritising reaching those in greatest need.

We have ASSISTANCE



We have access to food, water, shelter, safety, healthcare, and education in ways that do not take away from our dignity.



Where there are no alternatives to direct delivery, we deliver assistance in a synchronised and transparent way – while integrating protection into our response.

We have ACCOUNTABILITY



We hold authorities accountable for their failings, successes and learnings.



We monitor and continuously improve our practices, putting people's interest above self-interest.



We have **COMMUNITY**



We (re)connect with family and create a sense of community and humanity with others.



We build and enable relationships based on human connection and trust.

We have **FUTURE**



We seize education, employment and enterprise opportunities.



We enable skills development, employment and enterprise opportunities by leveraging wider networks, markets, and working with non-humanitarian actors.

We are **SELF-RELIANT**



We focus on our long-term needs and aspirations.



We withdraw and re-deploy or return home.

Future 'response' modes

The following describes three future 'response' modes that suggest the different ways in which the international humanitarian system might deliver aid based on a clear understanding of the needs of crisis-affected people and its own role in meeting those needs. Each mode describes the purpose of the response, as well as the respective roles of international, national, local, and other frontline actors. These modes are not perfect; they are meant to serve as starting points for reflection and discussion. They are also not mutually exclusive. In protracted crises, a comprehensive response likely requires all three modes to be in operation in some combination. However, factors such as capacity, governance, and sudden changes in the conflict/crisis situation, will determine which 'response' mode(s) will be needed most.

Fail safe

Provides timely and appropriate assistance and protection based on humanitarian principles in situations where the state and other response actors are unable/unwilling to adequately address the nature and scale of needs. The international humanitarian community leads in planning, coordination and/or delivery of services/goods. Local and national organisations collaborate and support where appropriate and possible.

Network

Collaborates with and complements existing actors and systems wherever possible. Community-based, local, national, or other frontline organisations lead response efforts. The international humanitarian community supports national and local efforts by filling gaps in coverage and expertise.

Cooperative

Links up short-term needs with longer-term aspirations and opportunities. International humanitarian organisations connect and work with crisis-affected communities and others to decrease dependency, support a return to stability and enable self-reliance.



'We survive and feel safe'

'Our needs, perspectives and agency shape decisions and action'

'We stabilise, grow and dream'



'We lead the response to assist and protect'

'We stand back, listen, collaborate and support'

'We facilitate and let go when needed. We create opportunity'

prototypes for action

5

Guided by the future vision, 50 global participants in a design workshop developed more than 400 ideas to prototype. Of these, 27 ideas were shortlisted, of which 4 were chosen to be explored in greater detail, including ideas around innovative financing, better supporting local responses, and improving accountability. These prototypes would go on to be 'user-tested' in workshops and interviews with those who are engaged in the application of similar concepts.



funding

INDEPENDENT,
UNIFIED
FINANCING
MECHANISM

INSURANCE FOR
SELF-RELIANCE

HUMANITARIAN
MONEY NOW

FAST: FUNDING
APPROVAL SPEEDY
TRANSITION

MUTUALISATION
FOR COMMUNITY
CHOICE

COMMUNITY-LED
RESPONSE FUND



safeguarding

FAILURE
TARGETS

PLAINTIFF
ATTORNEYS
WITHOUT BORDERS

HUMANITARIAN
ANALYST SQUAD

DOWN WITH RED
TAPE

RELIEF WATCH

INDEPENDENT
NEEDS
ASSESSMENT BODY



assisting

NO LABELS

UNIVERSAL ID /
HUMANITARIAN
PASSPORT

INTENDED
OBSOLESCENCE
INCENTIVES

MAKING PALS /
ENFORCED
ETHNOGRAPHY

LANGUAGE
LESSONS

PROOF OF
COMPETENCE IN
LOCAL
KNOWLEDGE

HUMANITARIAN
SOCIAL ECONOMY



connecting

LOCAL HIRING
PRACTICES

INGOs AS
SUBSIDIARIES OF
LOCAL NGOS

UNITED BEYOND
NATIONS



multiplying

REFUGEE CHARTER
CITIES

LICENSE FOR RENT

TIME
BANK



storytelling

COMMUNITY
NEWS

CONTEXTUALISE
HUMANITARIAN
PRINCIPLES

Linking real-time, community-led assessments of need with flexible funding structures for rapid response

Community-led Response Fund

overview

A large proportion of response in crisis-affected areas is led and implemented by a self-motivated set of local responders and community-led groups. These responders often possess the appropriate local connections and deep contextual knowledge to respond effectively. However, they receive very little direct funding from donors to properly implement and scale their work, and are often dependent on larger international organisations for resources. This relationship also compels them to act based on the priorities set by these large organisations.

The Community-Led Response Fund concept is driven by the need to direct unrestricted funding to local responders based on priorities set by the community. The Community-led Response Fund would allow communities and community groups to organise, assess needs, and implement responses. Donors contribute directly to the Fund to offset operations in areas where they may be less present due to access issues, geopolitics, etc., and to address needs not covered by other humanitarian organisations.

The Fund links real-time self-assessment of threats, capacities and opportunities with immediate actions in rapidly changing crisis response situations. This kind of model promotes local ownership of both problems and solutions. There is an evaluation process by national NGOs or existing community councils who have deep contextual knowledge, and recipients account for the money in a cost-effective way. Primary accountability will be to the communities themselves through publication of all decisions, plans and financial data (transfers, bills paid, etc.) using appropriate means (billboards, social media reporting and peer feedback via Twitter and Facebook, etc.). In a rapid onset/evolving crisis phase, support for specific self-help initiatives are vetted by pre-trained national/local NGO-staff (as appropriate) to ensure that humanitarian and other principles, such as 'do no harm' are upheld. They also ensure that there is subsequent light-touch follow-up through mentoring and monitoring.

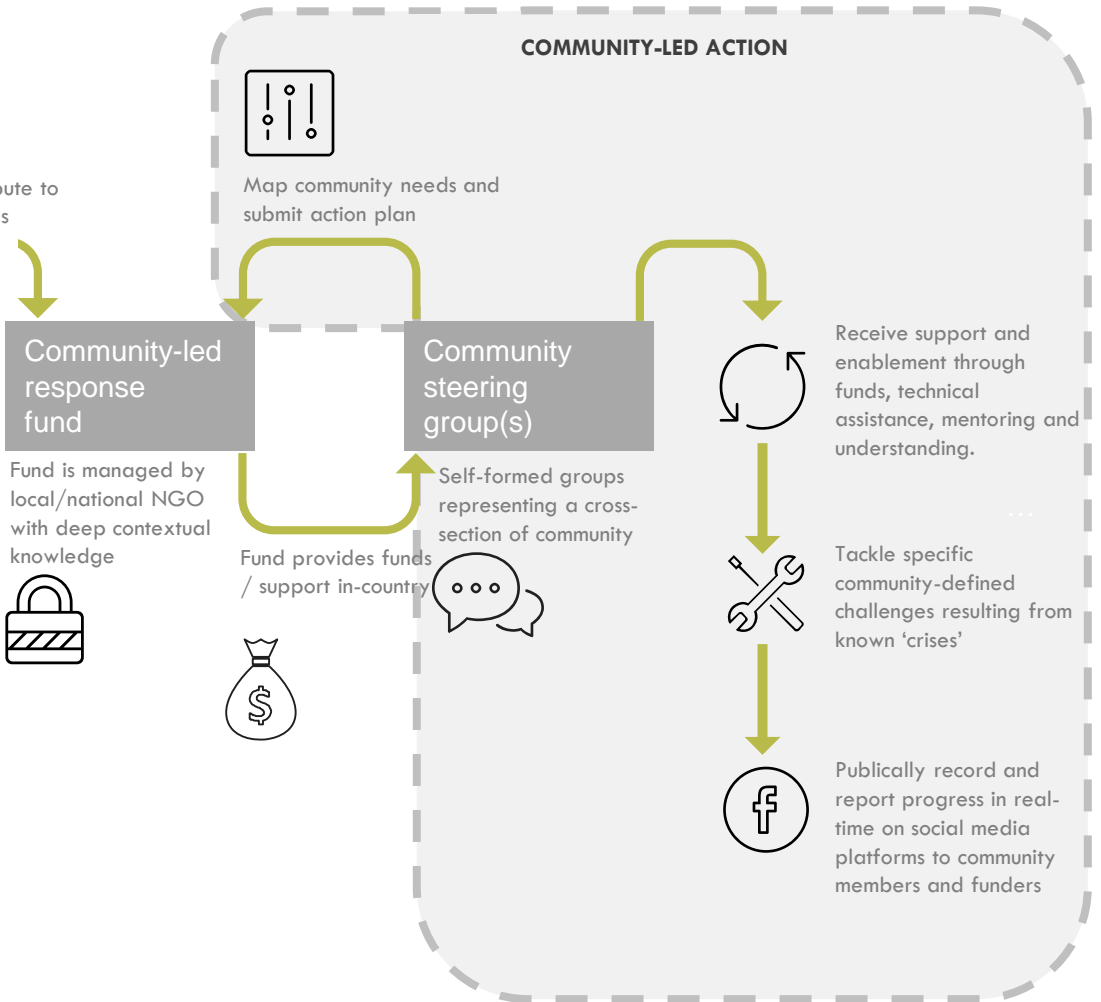
aims and objectives

- 1** Fill gaps relating to access, reach and coverage by supporting community-led response efforts already on the ground.
- 2** Disburse funds rapidly and directly to local response efforts and activities.
- 3** Build upon the energy, skills and agency of survivor-led and sometimes informal community-based groups who have a vested interest in rapid and accountable action.
- 4** Respond to needs that may not be immediately life threatening, but the community deems worthy of immediate action, such as dignified burials and critical infrastructure repair.
- 5** Strengthen linkages between funders, responders and affected communities through meaningful relationships that reduce the emphasis on paperwork and increase the emphasis on listening, understanding, action and transparency.

how it works



Funders contribute to in-country funds



Community members, activists and others recognise a crisis or problem in their community and come together to form a group and seek help. Alternatively, an already-formed community-based organisation working in a particular area decides to take action.

These community-based self-formed groups or organisations conduct quick needs assessments through interviews, conversations with community members and local leaders, and/or surveys to better understand the problem, key partners and ways to synergize with relevant organisations and response efforts.

Community-based groups become aware of the Community-led Response Fund, where they access funding directly to address their problem. They submit a proposal with an action plan requesting a grant and assistance.

Donors contribute directly to the Community-led Response Fund. An intermediary organisation, such as a national NGO or an international NGO working at the frontline with deep contextual knowledge, reviews the proposal and checks that the groups is able to ensure compliance with humanitarian standards. Upon approval, funds are rapidly disbursed.

The intermediary organisation provides training and support for the community group to strategize and implement solutions. They also provide light-touch monitoring throughout the proposed period. Community groups work with other groups and partners to carry out tasks to address problems.

Community groups use social media such as Facebook pages, discussion groups, and tweets to inform members in the community on how funds are used, who is involved, the progress of activities, and expected outcomes. They also provide simplified reporting structures to update donors and intermediaries on their activities.

An independent watchdog evaluating the impact of humanitarian aid using peer-to-peer and top-down approaches

Relief Watch

overview

Currently there is an overall lack of accountability within the humanitarian sector. Most evaluations take place either internally or by external organisations with a stake in current or future response efforts, and therefore have the potential for conflict of interest and dishonesty. Moreover, independent needs assessments, when they are actually done, are not always linked with strategic planning, coordination and delivery of aid.

Relief Watch aims to function as an independent body centered on accountability for how funds are used, coverage, quality and relevance of aid delivered. This concept endeavors to produce standardised frameworks for identification of areas of success and failure, contribute to increased quality and value for money, provoke public debate, address the scrutiny of aid and questions on how aid is used.

Most importantly, this entity stands outside of the sector and is not linked to any one humanitarian organisation. At the global governance level, it is composed of individuals such as journalists, and other experienced individuals no longer affiliated with a particular organisation, but who are familiar with the expectations placed on the sector. There will also be rotating member representatives appointed by different international humanitarian organisations. At the local level, trained local representatives collect and share data and report on ground-level activities.

There is a public reporting function, as well as strict enforcement mechanisms to deter bad behaviour. These mechanisms include corruption busting, sanctioning individuals, and linking with legal entities representing crisis affected people. If effective, it could have an enormous impact on the sector's own capacity to achieve impact. This concept has the potential to equip donors with an in-depth understanding of how their money is used and its impact on the ground.

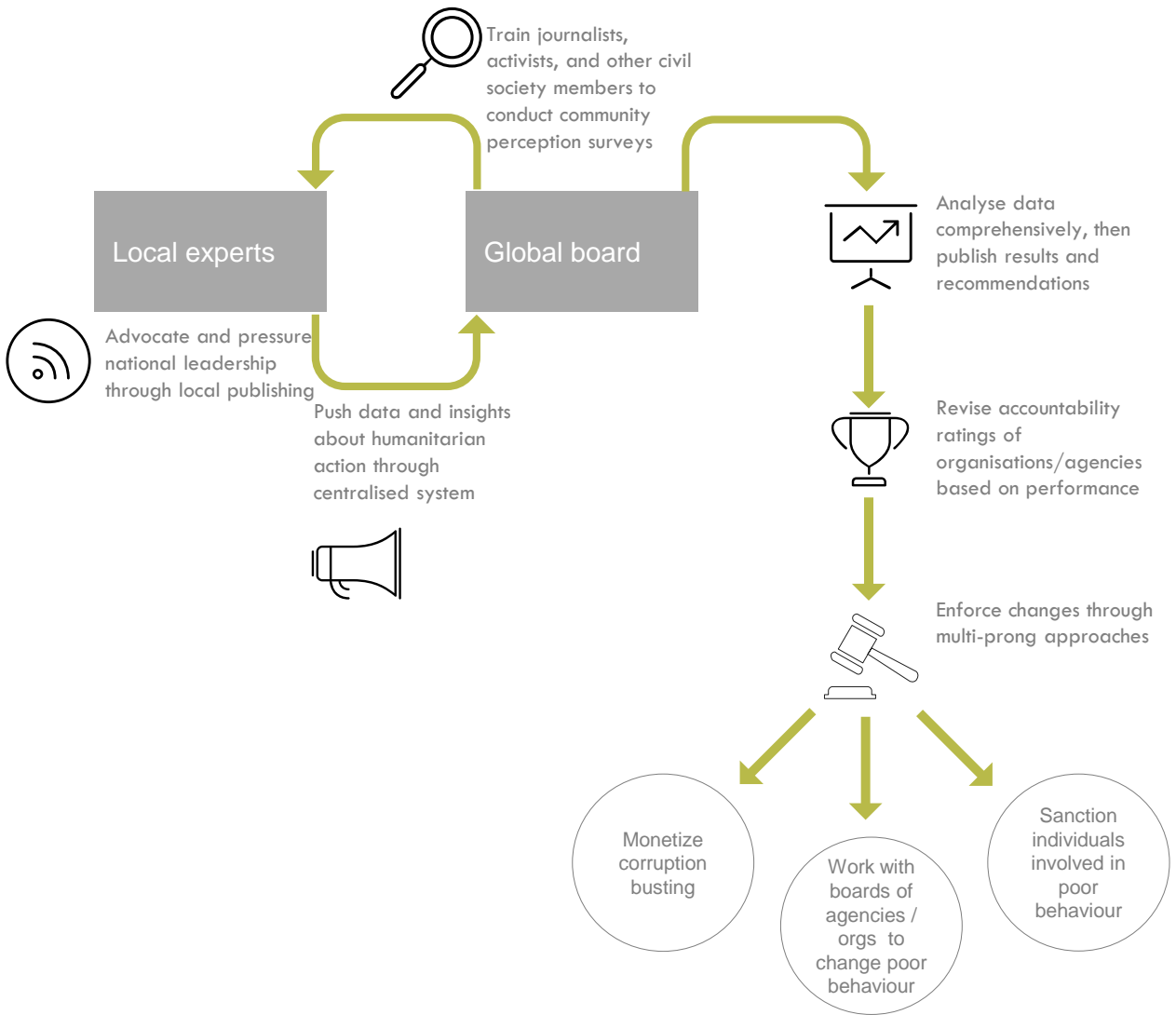
This concept could be funded through an automatic 1% tax from all participating humanitarian actors to generate funds. This would require a clear understanding of who will be taxed, and an agreement by the actors in the system to participate. Private and/or pooled funding could supplement this, and delinks the politics of particular government donors and international actors.

The people who are pioneering this concept envision it as a driver for change, and as a tool for learning from success and mistakes from aid delivery.

aims and objectives

- 1 Empower actors at the international and national level to understand, monitor and/or react to the performance of those responding (or not) to crisis.**
- 2 Analyse and report objectively on needs, expenditure and activity; to identify gaps, especially where people are not receiving the right things and/or where people are not receiving anything.**
- 3 Develop a strong network of pressure delivery relationships with boards, political associations, and other groups in order shift the behaviours of aid actors, aid donors and crisis affected governments.**
- 4 Forces agencies to think about their impact on people rather than just reporting on resource use and output back to donors.**
- 5 Creates a culture of honesty about failure, and relieves pressure to present results as perfect and predictable.**

how it works



A board made of highly mixed groups. They are outside the sector, such as journalists, experienced leaders, and representatives appointed by traditional humanitarian organisations who are periodically rotated out/replaced.

Train journalists, activists, civil society members to conduct community perception surveys, media monitoring, rumour tracking of aid response. Support them to report, advocate, and pressure national leadership.

Create a centralised system for local accountability experts to share data and insights/stories on crisis response and effectiveness of humanitarian organisations.

Analytical experts gather and analyse data from community surveys, media reports, etc. and compare those with information from independent needs assessments to determine impact of crisis response and effectiveness of international and local agencies.

Publish findings in the media and create reports with detailed accounts of failings and successes of aid efforts. Generate accountability rankings of organisations, similar to financial credit ratings.

Develop strong set of enforcement mechanisms via incentivising boards of humanitarian agencies and donors to change poor practices, monetize corruption busting and sanction individuals involved in poor performance and bad behaviours.

Connecting procurement supply chains of humanitarian actors with displacement affected community owned cooperatives for a sustainable social economy

Humanitarian Social Economy

overview

In many protracted crisis scenarios, displaced people experience life under conditions of liminality, both spatial and temporal. As a result, they often remain dependent on international aid for extended periods of time with little opportunity for leading self-reliant, dignified lives.

This concept reimagines the relationship between humanitarian actors and displacement-affected communities in protracted situations by building a sustainable social economy. Here, international humanitarian actors forego their function as direct providers of aid in favour of two new roles. First, they mobilise their convening capabilities to form a working group in partnership with local state authorities and public institutions, community-based organisations, and local NGOs to enable and facilitate a cluster of community-owned enterprises that form the backbone of the humanitarian social economy. Second, as a procuring organisation or 'anchor institution', humanitarian response organisations become clients of displacement-affected communities through their 'worker-owned cooperatives.'

Initially, this concept may work best in protracted crisis settings with a significant international humanitarian response presence. Donors grant money directly to a 'community investment fund' – with a committee composed of elected members of the host community and representatives from displaced populations – to review, advise/assist, and provide seed capital for worker owned cooperatives. The 'enabling actor' can act as liaison between the fund committee and donors to assist in building its financial and governance structure.

Refugees, internally displaced and host community members can connect through these worker owned cooperatives to produce goods and services that meet the procurement needs of humanitarian anchor organisations working in the area. The community affected by displacement themselves manage the means of production in exchange for living wages.

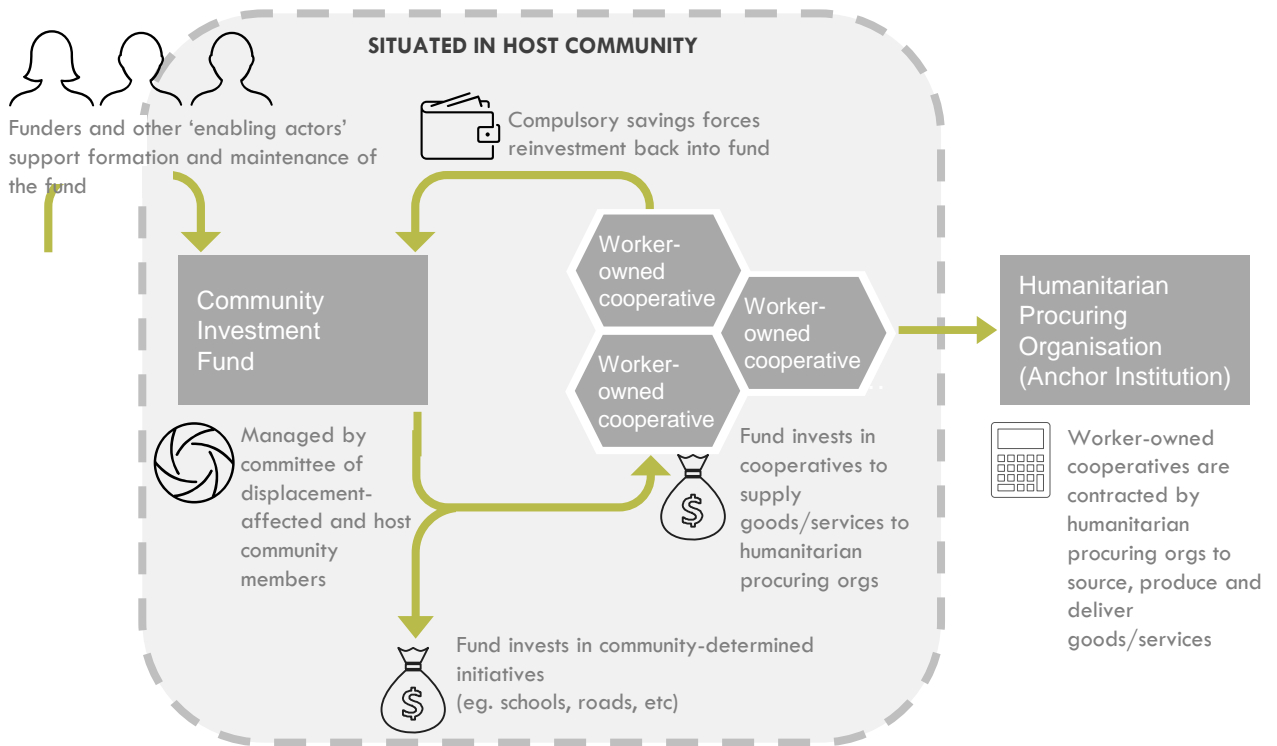
Alongside this, a certain portion of profit from each cooperative is reinvested towards the fund through a compulsory savings scheme, and the remaining percentage is retained by the members of the cooperative for their own private use. The money from the community investment fund can be directed towards community needs, such as, supporting community-owned schools, health clinics, etc. This all builds greater integration between the local population and the refugees, who are all potential worker-owners.

The humanitarian social economy concept has a multiplier effect by allowing displacement-affected people to reinvest their money into dignified, self-determined opportunities that significantly expand the size of displacement-affected economies.

aims and objectives

- 1** Creating space for existing residents and new arrivals to work in common cause under dignified working conditions.
- 2** Establishing self-sustained financing of humanitarian interventions thereby strengthening displacement affected communities' capacity to withstand future shocks.
- 3** Launching a community fund, through which surplus from worker-owned cooperatives can be recycled to finance further community initiatives.
- 4** Establishing worker owned cooperatives, producing goods and services that can meet the procurement needs of humanitarian agencies and INGOs.
- 5** Creating exit strategies from protracted situations for humanitarian actors, enabling them to focus more on emergency situations and on populations that do not have access to the humanitarian social economy.

how it works



Funders can contribute to a community investment fund by liaising with an enabling actor group – comprised of representatives from local municipality, displacement-affected community, local, national, and international NGOs, and humanitarian agencies. The investment fund is composed of representatives from displacement-affected and host community members. The enabling actors assist in the initial financial and governance setup of the fund.

The fund's committee assists in needs assessment, strategy and investment planning. In addition, they determine which cooperatives to fund, provide business support. The cooperatives in turn, receive seed capital and assistance to set up their business, and negotiate with humanitarian anchor institutions to procure a fix-term contract to produce goods.

The owner-workers of the cooperatives produce high-quality goods for anchor institutions, such as UN agencies and international NGOs, and receive wages and cover costs from the exchange. A percentage of the profit from the sales (e.g. 30%) are returned to the workers as a dividend. The workers can decide to reinvest a proportion into the company or use for consumption or other purposes.

The system requires that a proportion of the profit (e.g. 70%) is reinvested into the fund. The fund's committee determines how and when that money can be used. The worker-owned cooperatives make annual accounts available for scrutiny by the Community Investment Fund.

Based on needs assessments, and priorities in the community, the investment fund committee can fund community development initiatives, such as, supporting community-owned schools, health clinics, etc.

The investment fund committee reports progress and results back to donors, and also keeps the community abreast of how the money is used and invested.

A humanitarian network and platform where people affected by crisis can connect with responders and service providers who have a matching supply for their demand

United Beyond Nations

overview

This concept envisions a humanitarian system that is networked, adaptive and driven by problem-solving rather than by mandate-based service provision. Currently, local responses during a crisis are coordinated in an ad hoc manner, relying on established relationships with other international humanitarian actors. This concept aims to have a quicker, more flexible, adaptable response, and connects people and organisations beyond the international humanitarian sector.

Using a digital platform, this concept is to create a network where local organisations/community-based groups have access to a local, regional and global network of people with skills and resources that are pre-vetted, and can be mobilised in a decentralised way to solve specific and defined humanitarian problems.

People affected by crisis and first responders needing support can make requests through the platform and interact with a bot (artificial intelligence) to help 'diagnose' the problem and determine needs. The platform will provide a list of certified and nearby providers, who have resources or expertise to deliver customised, needs-based solutions. For more complicated problems, requests will be escalated to the platform secretariat, composed of representatives from national government, NGOs, and international experts, to determine operational and technical needs, as well as validators. Certification of providers and members in the network will be done by the platform's ISO committee. Quality assurance could be ensured through: franchising; peer-review; or public ratings system.

This concept can maintain both online and offline capabilities by enabling offline representatives to feed requests into the network and act as liaisons. Money can be contributed into the network through private individuals, web-based crowd sourcing platforms, or as institutional donors funding certified NGO initiatives/requests.

Responders and providers on the ground may choose to self-fund certain requests as well. People who make requests through the platform will report back on the quality of service received from providers, and potentially with donors who funded service providers.

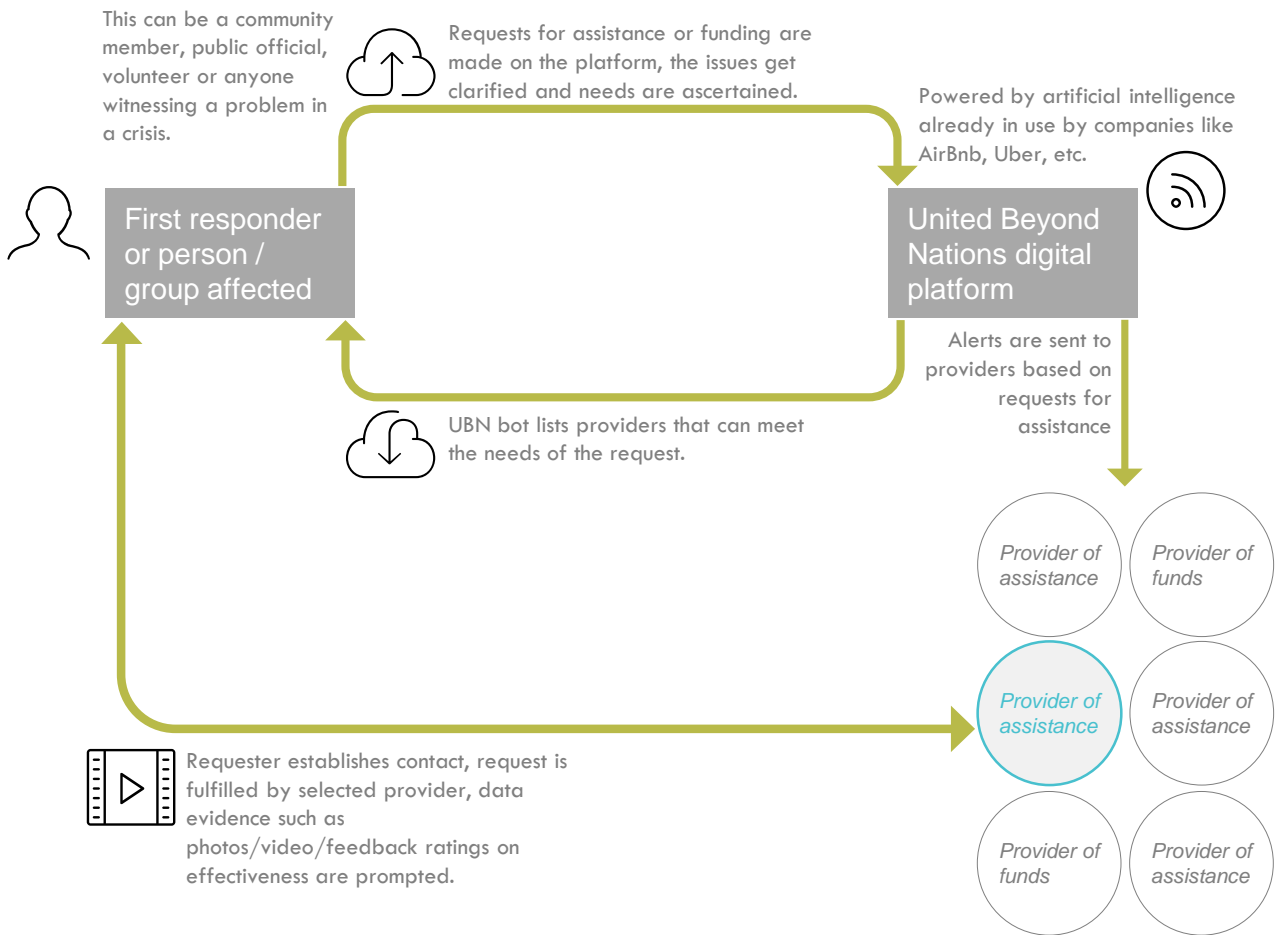
This concept aims to automate the transactional activities that humanitarian actors currently spend a large amount of time on, and instead places value on human relationship-building efforts. This concept will mainly address low cost, lower complexity problems, and is not a substitute for state action or covering the the full range of needs in a crisis situation. As state capacity improves, the need for this platform will likely decrease. This concept accommodates and can work concurrently and weave in with the international humanitarian system.

aims and objectives

- 1 Having more nimble, agile, and appropriate crisis response that is grounded in problem solving.**
- 2 Enabling local response as a first response. Building a community of service providers by drawing on and supporting local response capacity and resources.**
 - Tapping into a broad range of actors and capabilities regionally and globally, to expand the 'we' within the system.**
- 3 Discouraging and undermining institutional flag planting, and instead rejuvenating solidarity as the starting point for humanitarian response.**
- 4 Levering technology to connect people and organisations in a rapid way, and have fail-safe mechanisms for offline services to overcome barriers in network connectivity.**
- 5**

This concept name was inspired by Skinner, P. (2018) Collaborative Advantage: How collaboration beats competition as a strategy for success. London: Robinson

how it works



A person affected, frontline responder or community organisation encounters a specific problem during a crisis, and identifies what they need from the specific 'problem areas' on the United Beyond Nations digital platform.

They register their organisation into the platform. They then make a request by providing details of the problem, what their specific needs are and the kind of help required. The bot assesses the request and ascertains the needs.

The bot verifies providers in the network, and prioritises certified / highly rated responders. It searches for a match at the local level first, and if it can't find one, then it goes regional, and failing that, national or international. If the problem is more complex, the issue is escalated to the platform secretariat to determine support.

The bot lists options in rank order based on capacity to address the specific needs and reviews. The person making the request can choose and connect with the preferred provider(s).

Responders and providers on the ground can self-fund requests or submit a request into the platform to access individual private donors, or institutional/public pooled funds. The bot assesses the financial needs quickly and can rapidly disburse money from pooled funds or through private individuals or web-based fundraising platforms.

All who make requests on the digital platform are required to rate the quality of service they have received from providers they work with, and can interact with donors through a chat service. They will be requested to provide simplified reports of completed work through sharing photographs, audio/video recordings, testimonials etc.

conclusion

6

While the prototypes detailed above are a product of this particular process, the shifts in behaviour and ethos explored through this different approach can be applied to other reform initiatives across the sector. These shifts, detailed here, are based on the empathetic approach of design-thinking and help to imagine an alternative humanitarian action.

our ethos

People affected by crisis and conflict have rights. When states struggle – or fail – to protect and provide for their people’s needs, the global community has an obligation to act. We, the Core Design Team on this project, recognise that efforts to serve people affected by crisis have often been compromised by the incentive structures of the system in which we operate. We recognise that, at its worst, the sector can be impatient, competitive, bureaucratic, and demonstrate poor accountability to the people it claims to be helping. It is time to turn this behaviour on its head, unravel the current top-down model of humanitarian action and create a new paradigm. This new paradigm has three core elements: Agency, Adaptability and Accountability. Using this paradigm, we:

Agency

1. acknowledge that people affected by crisis are humanitarian actors and active agents of change in their own lives;
2. commit to recognising and supporting those best positioned to respond, irrespective of our own political agendas and financial interests; and
3. commit to addressing the imbalance between the voices of donors and the voices of crisis affected communities, so as to place them at the centre of policy, planning and operational decision making.

Adaptability

1. acknowledge that others have an important and legitimate role to play in assisting and protecting crisis affected communities; and
2. commit to creating organisational incentives for collaboration, co-creation and failing-forward in a spirit of honesty, transparency and learning.

Accountability

1. commit to independent reviews of our application of humanitarian principles and professional standards and publishing the results of such reviews.
2. aim to ensure a level of coverage, assistance and protection in line with the principle of impartiality and in line with fundamental human rights.

With this in mind, we will do three things: work and advocate for states to better fulfil their obligations; mobilise a diverse coalition of actors to test new models of support, and source new funding streams to stimulate and embed innovation.

What does success look like? A more sustainable humanitarian system that better addresses needs, shows greater accountability to people affected by crises, and is less exposed to political agendas.

Living the ethos: a behavioural shift

The principles and values contained within the starting ethos cannot live by decree alone. Instead, they live through the behaviours and practices of humanitarians who uphold them everyday. Living this ethos means nurturing a new approach, a behavioural shift through a different way of thinking, speaking, and doing.



Thinking differently

attitudes & beliefs

Attitudes can signify one's membership to a particular group; they act as an extension of shared values.

The new humanitarian worldview relies on actors' belief in: transparency even when it's not convenient, power that's shared rather than assumed, trust in actors not because they have the credentials but because they have earned it, accountability that's human-centred and downward – to the people who humanitarian action purports to serve, and dignified pathways to a healthy and productive life. Above all, it is seeking out previously unheard, smothered, and ignored voices within the humanitarian conversation.



Speaking differently

linguistics & lexicon

Words are actions – what we say has a force, an influence, on the world around us.

This new approach embraces this. It rejects the concept of a 'beneficiary' as a non-actor. Beneficiary as 'rights holder', coordination as 'synchronisation' or 'symphony', and sector as 'network' represent examples of the new perspectives and intentions forged through an alternative humanitarian lexicon.



Doing differently

ritual & ceremony

Ritual, routine, and other activities help us inscribe meaning into our lives.

This means going far beyond attendance at exclusive conferences or making global commitments which fail to be adequately enforced. The new approach to humanitarian action means more day-to-day rituals and ceremonies that incentivise proactive trust-building, reward genuine collaboration, and prescribe complementarity to avoid parallel structures.



Thinking differently means...

Rejecting the following:

Sanitising political problems AND colonial attitudes to power.

Mandate-driven mindsets that breed exclusivity and entitlement.

Easy and comfortable simplifications of any sort, ie. international is rational, neutral, impartial and independent – whereas local is primitive, biased and self-interested OR international is self-interested and biased – whereas local is authentic and just.

Simplistic and emotive statements as a way of avoiding the difficult realities.

Orthodoxy and self-satisfied, self-censoring consensus in favour of questioning and disagreeing.

Unhelpful dichotomies, such as Saviour V victim AND Giver V receiver AND Deserving V undeserving AND Good/just V bad/evil



Speaking differently means...

Using the words:

Crisis-affected

Agent/Actor

Rights-holder

Disaster-affected

Reciprocity

Producer/Participant

Displacement-affected

Solidarity

Investment

Rejecting the words

Recipient

Host/guest

Localisation

Beneficiary

Caseload

Traditional/non-traditional

Charity

No longer use “us/them” phrasing as an active “us” suggests crisis-affected people play a passive role in crisis response.

No longer conduct meetings, write reports, and share knowledge exclusively in the English language. Language and form is adapted based on audience.



Doing differently means...

No longer have meetings, conferences, or fora about people who are not present, or at least represented, at the table. It is now ‘never about us without us’

No longer putting up psychological, political or physical barriers between each other

No longer planting flags or competing out of habit

Openness to working with actors outside of the international humanitarian system (and non-humanitarian actors working towards common goals) rather than supplant or exclude.

Existing meetings and conferences and annual meetings become platforms for highlighting stories of human agency, community-led action and self-reliance.

No more unidirectional ‘capacity building’ activities that assume international actors are the teachers and local actors as the students. It is now about a spirit of learning and sharing knowledge as equal contributors to ongoing and adaptive learning processes.