

The nexus between humanitarian and development needs and responses is a complex reality. Following the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, the humanitarian-development divide has been increasingly targeted for action by the aid community¹. Since then, the number of people affected by humanitarian crises has grown, while the world's willingness to fund responses has not kept pace. Likewise, the willingness of richer countries to accept displaced persons is falling², and over 80 percent of refugees and asylum seekers live in countries in developing regions³. The obvious corollary is that there has never been a more urgent need to realise a humanitarian-development convergence.

Humanitarian aid is now required to address protracted and complex emergencies, and needs to deliver both inclusive and sustainable outcomes for refugees and the low resource communities that host them across a continuum of social, environmental, and economic needs. While the Education Cannot Wait initiative through UNDP and other actors is addressing some development needs in humanitarian settings, many humanitarian agencies have limited experience and resource capacity in development. Likewise, the skills of humanitarian workers with their immediate focus on humanitarian principles, saving lives, and alleviating suffering, are different to those of their development colleagues who tend to focus on sustainable poverty reduction and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Development responses tend to be longer-term, embedded in local government structures and strategies, and may aim for transformational change; there is often a poor fit between development plans and projects and the humanitarian sector. Humanitarian actors will need to be effective at working across sectors, not just within agencies or within clusters.

Development players with depth of learning and experience in livelihoods, resilience, climate adaptation, food production, and community-led development need to be partners. To break down the man-made divide between humanitarian and development agendas and respond to the continuum of needs in resource-low regions will require leveraging the different skill sets and approaches, and a commitment to working 'differently'.



A practical field-level tool for helping organisations working in humanitarian settings assess the skills of staff, and to understand where their own organisation lies on the humanitarian-development spectrum follows. It can serve as a discussion tool for inducting new staff and helping workers see the difference between their skills and approach, and what is needed. For organisations, it can be used to foster understanding of the sorts of partnerships or new skills they may need to respond.

1. [Secretary-General's Report to the 71st General Assembly, Outcome of the World Humanitarian Summit, 22 Sep 2016 pg11/22](#)
2. [How some European countries are tightening their refugee policies, Judith Vonberg, CNN Updated 1636 GMT \(0036 HKT\) February 22, 2017](#)
3. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017). Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2017 revision (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2017).

Development	Skills and motivations		Humanitarian
Poverty reduction	Altruistic motives to contribute to a better world		Alleviate suffering, prevent further loss of life
Longer-term bilateral and loan financing with a focus on capacity building, SDGs as goals	Patience and negotiation	Action-oriented	Shorter-term grant financing with more tangible outcomes and agreed standards that 'leave no one behind'
More secure environment with clearer geopolitical parameters	Implement strategic direction via projects with local co-workers	'Doing' in field and supporting field work in office, supervising local teams	Often in highly insecure environments with less predictable geopolitical parameters
Work with non-emergency government departments and client focused	Teamwork, influence, collaboration, and highly variable coordination	Teamwork, cluster system coordination	Work with other emergency agencies and emergency government departments
Creativity and entrepreneurship while bringing others along	Complex problem solving aiming for transformation	Rapid and responsive, aiming to meet basic needs and rights	Agile and adaptable
Often non-linear and need actions of others to succeed	Tolerance for uncertainty	Get it done with internally controlled processes	Linear
Strong accountability and reporting requirements for outcomes to donors and government	Complex and time consuming planning and MEAL approaches	Checklists and simple, aggregated data	Output accountability to donors and high public visibility
Culturally appropriate and politically sensitive communications	Influencing decision makers, advocacy	Rights frameworks, straightforward, decisive	Direct communications
Capacity building	Longer term, multidimensional, improving individual, organisational, and institutional capacity	Specific, skills-based transfer and action-oriented	Capacity building

Without an active acknowledgement of the different skill sets and approaches required for different aid modalities, there is the distinct possibility of reinventing the wheel as humanitarian agencies scramble to meet development needs, with inevitable slippage and waste as lessons learnt in development are re-learnt the hard way, instead of from each other. Humanitarian and development actors will need to stand on each other's shoulders by working together to utilise each other's deep skills, and communicate effectively to successfully lead a humanitarian-development cooperation that delivers for displaced people and host communities in protracted emergencies.

Useful Reading

[New Way of Working, UN OCHA](#)

[Exploring the Humanitarian-Development Nexus, NGO VOICE](#)

[Demystifying the Humanitarian, Development and Peace Nexus, ICVA](#)

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