

**FIXING THE
HUMANITARIAN
SYSTEM**
7 QUESTIONS
AND 7 ANSWERS



SUMMARY

The humanitarian sector is stretched to the limit. It is struggling to meet the growing demands posed by the changing nature of conflict, the changing nature of disasters and the protracted nature of crises. The prospects for the future are no better, with 125 million people currently requiring humanitarian assistance and 60 million being displaced.

Globally, responses to humanitarian disasters and conflict receive approximately 93% of financing compared to prevention. As humanitarian emergencies become more frequent and more complex and last longer, we have a responsibility to manage risks before they become crises. This requires working across sectors to address the root causes of conflict and to better support disaster risk reduction efforts.

The World Humanitarian Summit is a unique opportunity to bridge the divides between the peacebuilding, development, climate change and humanitarian communities to focus on prevention of disasters and conflict, and subsequently reduce humanitarian need.

THE 7 QUESTIONS

- Q1** Why was the World Humanitarian Summit called for?
- Q2** Why is humanitarian need increasing?
- Q3** What can be done to better deal with complex risks?
- Q4** How can humanitarian responses in conflict contexts be improved?
- Q5** What practical steps can be taken to promote integrated responses to humanitarian demands?
- Q6** How can the spiralling costs of humanitarian aid be met?
- Q7** How can the humanitarian system be remade so it is 'fit for purpose'?

Q1 Why was the World Humanitarian Summit called for?

Humanitarian needs have never been higher and assistance cannot meet the demands.

2015 was a year of humanitarian crises. The Syrian refugee crisis, the Ebola outbreak in west Africa, and extended conflicts in the Central African Republic, Iraq, South Sudan, Ukraine and Yemen have put extraordinary strain on the humanitarian system. This trend has continued well into 2016 and is set to accelerate. Crises are more protracted and displacement levels unprecedented.

Today, there are around 60 million people worldwide who have been forced to flee their homes – that's one person in every 122.¹ The average length of displacement due to war and persecution is 17 years.

The level of humanitarian assistance provided by the international community is at an all-time high.

Currently, we spend around US\$25 billion on humanitarian assistance for 125 million people affected by conflicts and disasters. Funding, however, is not sufficient to meet the needs. Humanitarian assistance faces an estimated funding gap of US\$15 billion.²

To tackle this challenge, UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon called for the first ever World Humanitarian Summit to be held in Istanbul, Turkey on 23-24th May 2016.

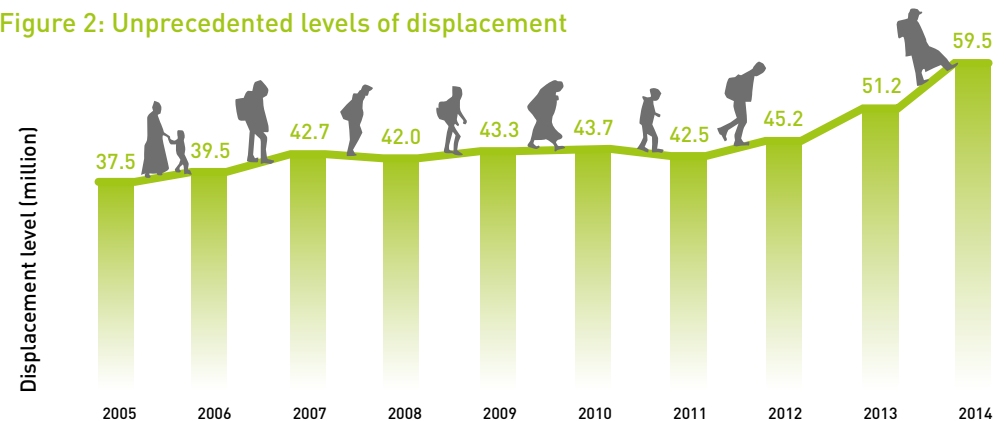
12 of the poorest 23 countries received less than US\$10 million for disaster risk reduction over 20 years, yet received US\$5.6 billion in disaster response.³

Figure 1: Humanitarian assistance to people affected by conflicts and disasters



© International Alert

Figure 2: Unprecedented levels of displacement



Source: UNHCR, Global trends report: World at war – Forced displacement in 2014, Geneva: UNHCR, 2015

Q2 Why is humanitarian need increasing?

Humanitarian need is increasing because crises are becoming more complex through the interactions between climate change, disasters and conflicts.

Not only are humanitarian crises on the rise, but also these crises are changing, largely due to climate change-driven extremes such as floods, droughts and typhoons.

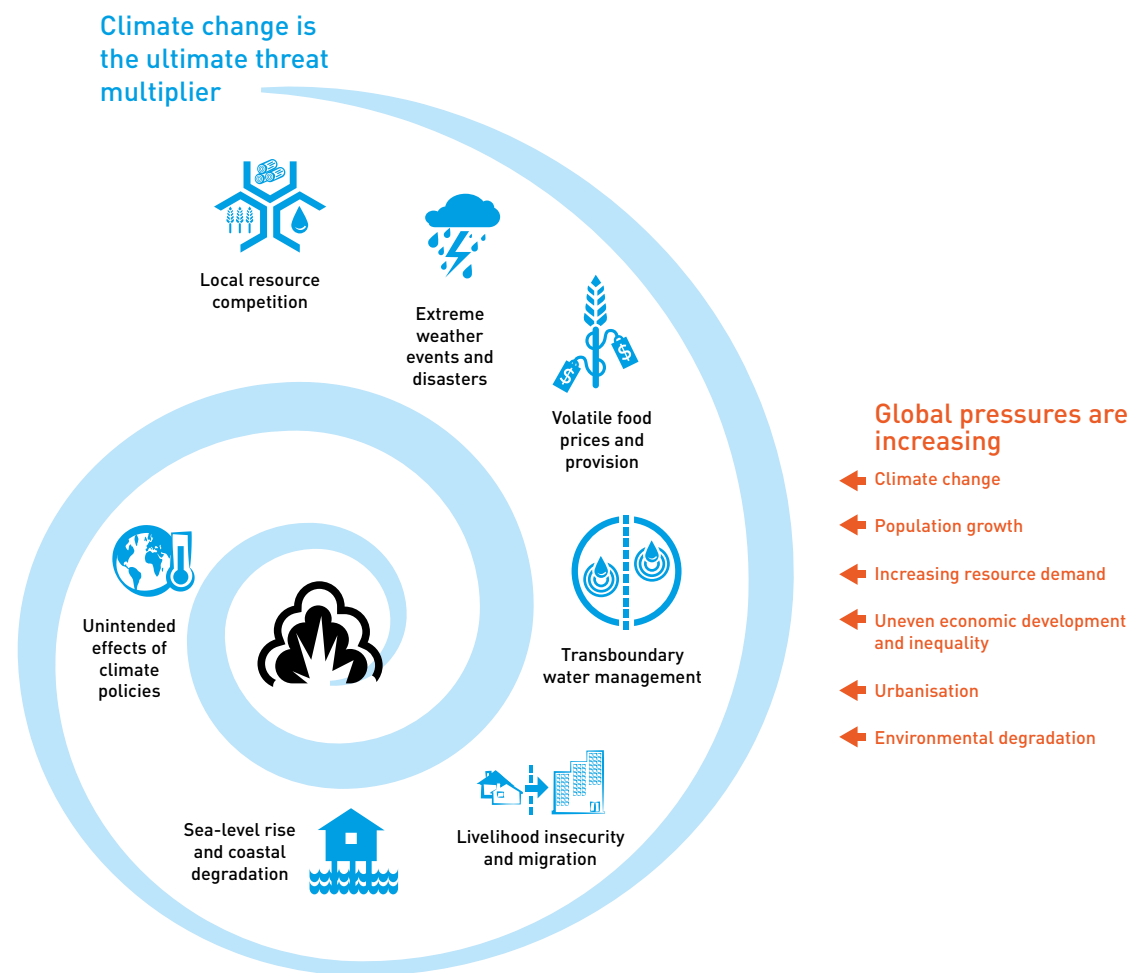
Over 90% of disasters are thought to be related to climate.⁴ Increasingly, climate change is converging with other pressures such as population growth, widening inequality, unplanned urbanisation, less food and water, and political instability, with complex results.

Humanitarian crises particularly affect fragile states, as they are less able to cope when disasters, extreme weather events and internal and external shocks hit.

More than 50% of people affected by disasters between 2005 and 2009 lived in fragile and conflict-affected areas.⁵

Science shows that extreme weather and disasters, which drive humanitarian needs, are also set to increase. As a result, more countries are slipping into fragility, further reducing their ability to cope when the next disaster strikes.

Figure 3: Seven compound climate-fragility risks threaten states and societies



Source: Adapted from © adelphi

Q3 What can be done to better deal with complex risks?

The interlinked nature of risks requires enhancing our capacities to undertake joint risk analysis.

As climate change, disasters and conflicts are interlinked, so too must be our responses. An important first step is improving our understanding and analysis of local contexts and the nature of risks.

Joint analysis can help determine a common understanding of the context, needs and capacities of government authorities, humanitarian, development, peace and security sectors.

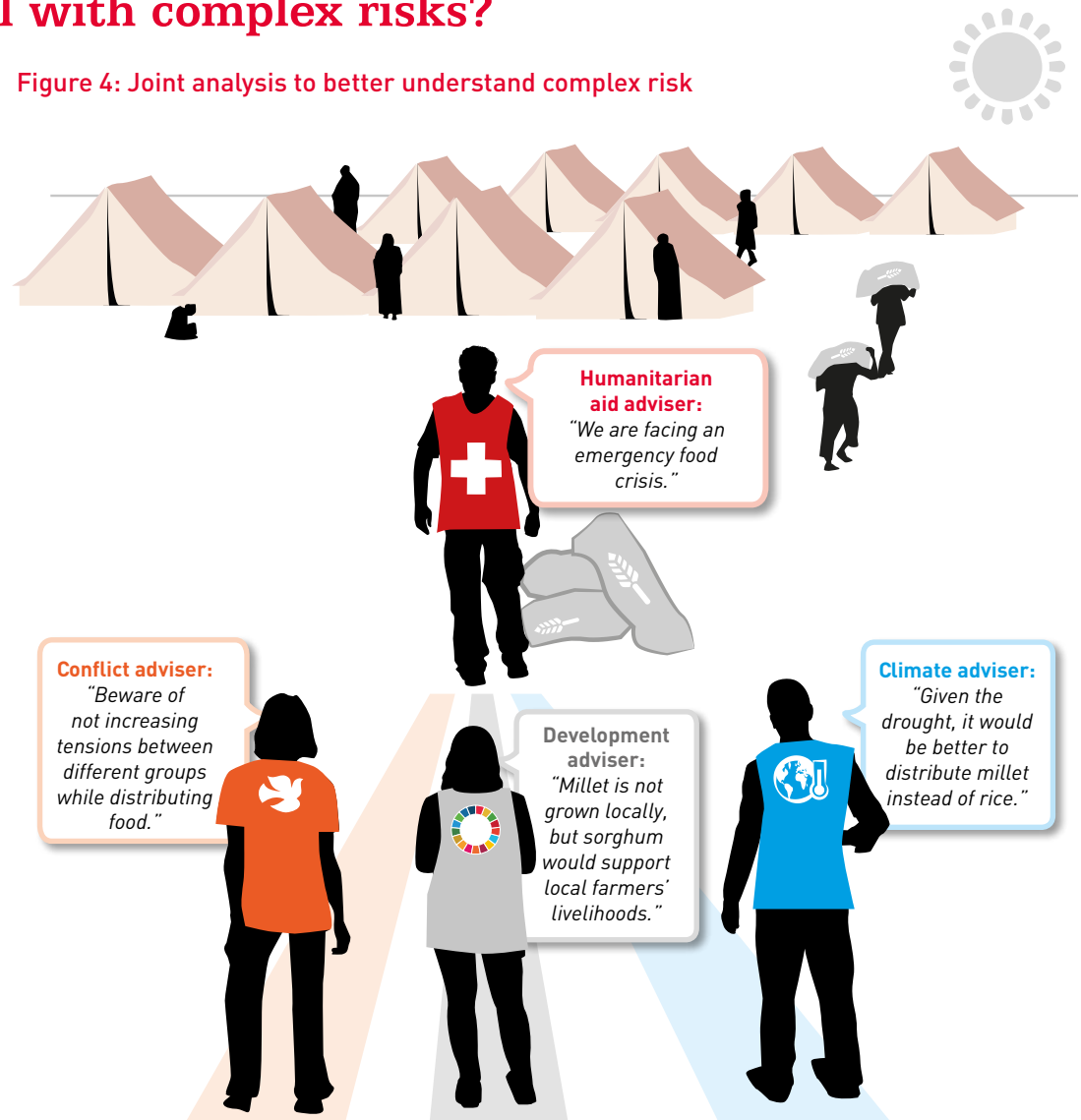
It can drive the development of complementary, system-wide strategies.

However, tools that reflect complex realities and help us identify multi-dimensional and interconnected risks are missing. A recent study found that, out of 66 risk assessment tools, only three looked at the issues of conflict, climate and environment together, and none of these did so very effectively.⁶

Risk analysis is also not enough. Capacities to translate this analysis into conflict- and climate-sensitive responses are equally important.

Only three out of 66 risk assessment tools reviewed look at conflict, climate and environment together, and none do so very effectively.

Figure 4: Joint analysis to better understand complex risk



Q4 How can humanitarian responses in conflict contexts be improved?

Applying a conflict-sensitive approach to humanitarian responses can minimise harm and assist in managing conflict risks in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

As crisis seems to dominate the world order, there are more and more spheres that could benefit from intervention.

Humanitarian agencies cannot altogether prevent violent conflicts or disasters from occurring. They can, however, inadvertently contribute to the escalation of conflict.

For instance, they can negatively affect conflict dynamics through the targeting of beneficiaries, the distribution of resources, service delivery or the (re)settlement of displaced people in ways that fuel existing grievances or create new ones.

But through well-designed interventions, humanitarian agencies can improve trust between different groups, enhance social cohesion and help build resilience.

By applying a 'do no harm' approach, they can contribute to a reduction in the risk of violence. This is not through changing 'what' they do, but by changing 'how' they do it.

Figure 5: Humanitarian responses: How to 'do no harm'



Q5 What practical steps can be taken to promote integrated responses to humanitarian demands?

Financing integrated responses can help achieve the triple dividends of conflict prevention, climate resilience and development.

Humanitarian funding – although at an all-time high and growing – is insufficient to meet the burgeoning demand. The funding that is available needs to be deployed more effectively.

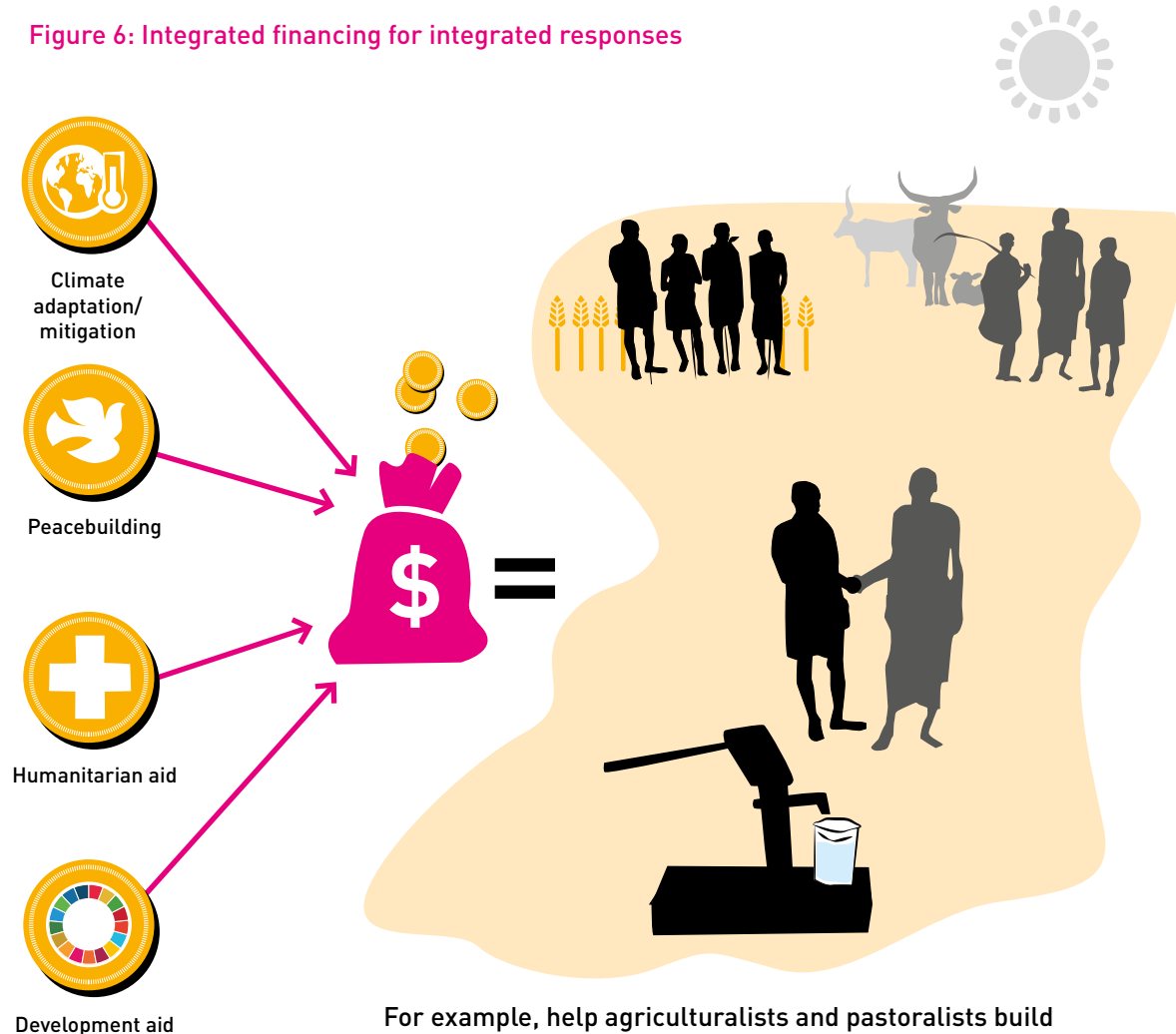
Though donors acknowledge the crucial nature of humanitarian assistance, it is unlikely the available pot of money will grow substantially.

This further underscores the importance of re-designing our funding architecture in such a way that it is better integrated and better able to address the multiple dimensions of vulnerability.

Effective responses through integrated financing can be achieved by:

- creating and prioritising hybrid funding streams that are not strictly humanitarian or developmental;
- incentivising more and better cross-sectoral work;
- providing flexible, accelerated and risk-tolerant funding; and
- creating financing mechanisms that take account of different needs and timeframes, particularly in protracted crises.

Figure 6: Integrated financing for integrated responses



For example, help agriculturalists and pastoralists build resilience to multiple risks, including climate change, poverty and conflict

Q6 How can the spiralling costs of humanitarian aid be met?

The cost of humanitarian assistance can be curbed by reducing the need – which means focusing on addressing climate change, disaster risk reduction and conflict prevention.

An estimated 93% of people living in extreme poverty are in countries that are either fragile or environmentally vulnerable, or both.⁷ This emphasises the need to address the underlying causes of crises. Investment in risk reduction and preparedness is far too low.

We can reduce the need for humanitarian assistance by acting on risk analyses earlier, by addressing the root causes of violent conflict and by investing in disaster resilience. An analysis of aid allocations demonstrates that:

- there is a disproportionate allocation of financing towards humanitarian assistance than to conflict prevention and disaster risk reduction – **globally, responses to humanitarian disasters and conflict receive approximately 93% of financing compared to prevention**,⁸
- **yet every US\$1 spent on disaster risk reduction and conflict prevention taken together could save US\$4 in response**,⁹ and
- few financing incentives exist for addressing the drivers of risk and vulnerability through early action, further reducing their ability to cope when the next disaster strikes.

Box 1: Aid – prevention versus response

 **Conflict prevention/Peacebuilding¹²**
= US\$1.7 billion

 **Disaster preparedness¹³**
= US\$649 million

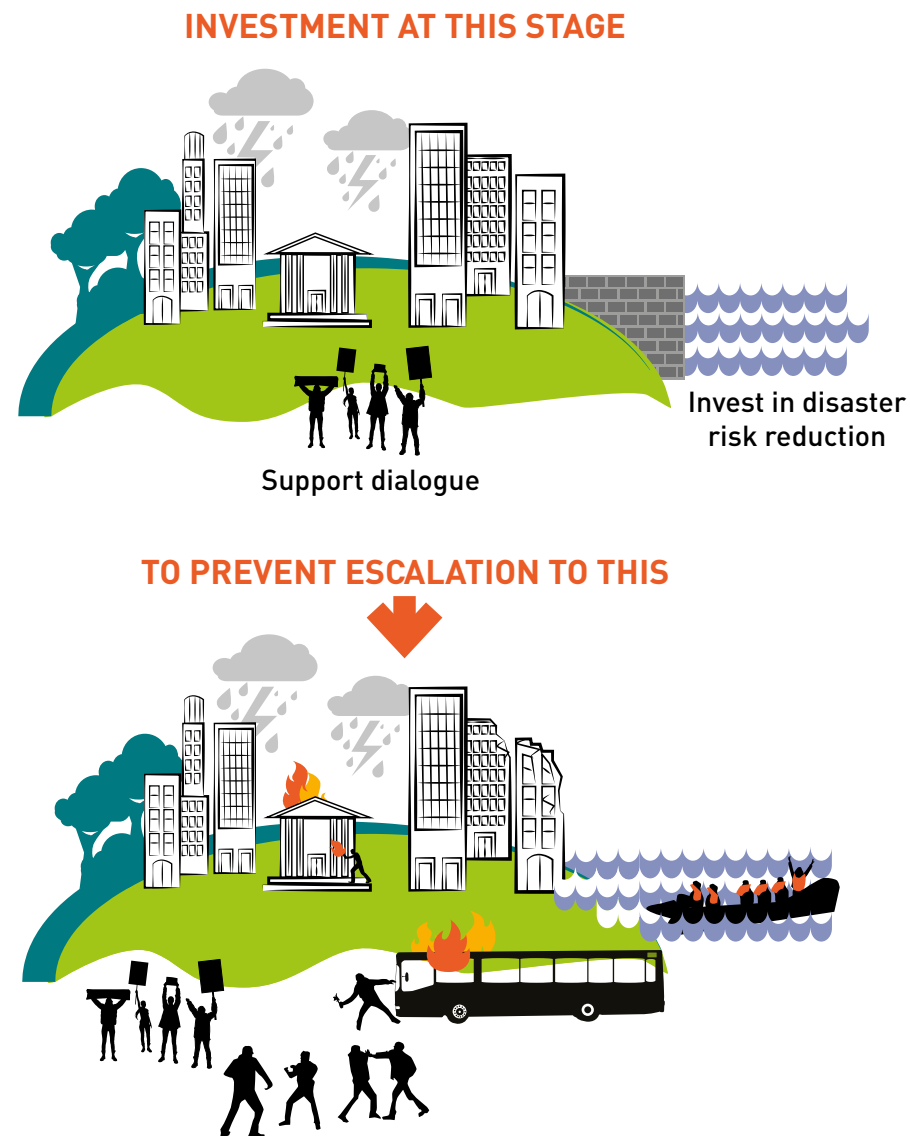
PREVENTION TOTAL: US\$2.35 BILLION

 **Humanitarian assistance¹⁰**
= US\$24.5 billion

Peacekeeping operations¹¹
= US\$9.5 billion

RESPONSE TOTAL: US\$34 BILLION

Figure 7: From crisis response to managing risk: Invest in conflict prevention and disaster risk reduction



Q7

How can the humanitarian system be remade so it is 'fit for purpose'?

Institutional reform is essential to help link different communities of practice and work towards collective and strategic outcomes.

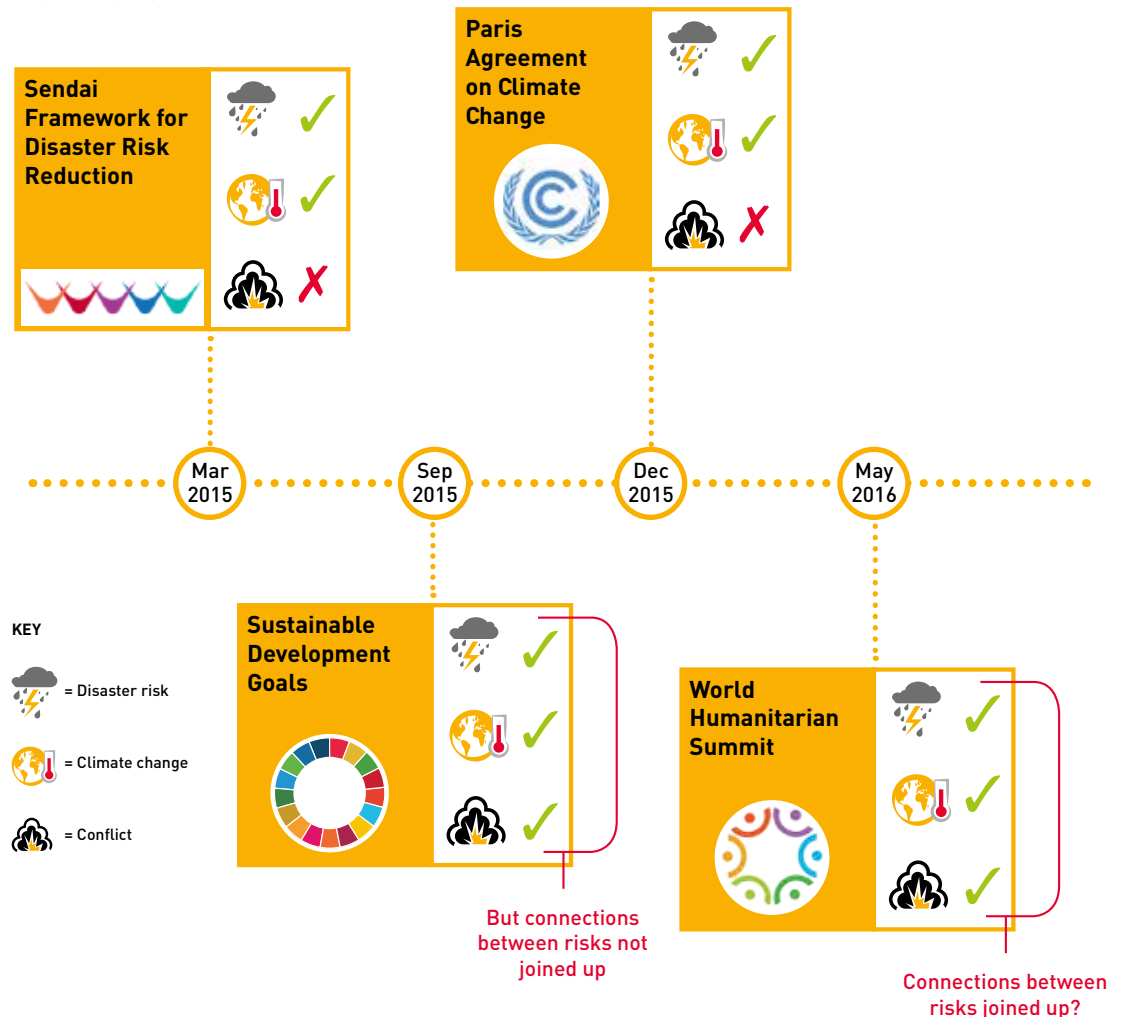
2016 is a catalyst year for action on climate change, disasters, development and peacebuilding. This follows the agreement last year of three groundbreaking new global pacts: the Paris Agreement on Climate Change; the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction; and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

However, largely absent in the new 2015 policy architecture is the explicit recognition of interconnected risks, particularly climate-conflict risks, which have a significant bearing on humanitarian assistance. The World Humanitarian Summit is a unique opportunity to make the humanitarian system fit for purpose by breaking through sectoral silos and linking different communities of practice. Not doing so calls into question the ability of the international community to deliver on the three agreements.

Meeting climate, development, humanitarian and peacebuilding goals, however, needs more than policy processes. It requires transformation of the very institutions that are tasked with delivering on these promises.

To be effective, the United Nations and bilateral donors need to reform the silos created by institutional mandates and financial structures. They need to move beyond short-term, project-driven responses and work towards collective, strategic outcomes. Humanitarian organisations should work more closely with development and peacebuilding organisations, particularly in cases of protracted crises, where more complex and longer-term approaches are needed.

Figure 8: Connecting the dots between conflict, climate change and disaster policy frameworks



Endnotes

1. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNHCR mid-year trends 2015, Geneva: UNHCR, 2015
2. High-level Panel on Humanitarian Financing Report to the Secretary General, Too important to fail – addressing the humanitarian financing gap, 2016
3. In the period 1991–2010. See J. Kellett and A. Caravani, Financing disaster risk reduction: A 20-year story of international aid, London and Washington DC: Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery and the Overseas Development Institute, 2013, p.37, <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8574.pdf>
4. The USD 1.3 trillion disaster protection gap: Innovative insurance tools exist to support governments to be better prepared, Swiss Re, 7 October 2015
5. J. Kellett and D. Sparks, Disaster risk reduction: Spending where it should count, Somerset: Development Initiatives, 2012
6. K. Peters and J. Vivekananda, Topic guide: Conflict, climate and environment, London: Evidence on Demand, UK Department for International Development, 2014
7. Development Initiatives, Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2015, Bristol, 2015
8. Calculations are based on financing data available for 2014. See Box 1 for more details on this calculation.
9. Disaster risk reduction ratio of 1:4 based on: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), World disasters report 2009, Geneva: IFRC, 2009 and two studies on United States Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) disaster prevention: 1) Multihazard Mitigation Council (MMC), Natural hazard mitigation saves: An independent study to assess the future savings from mitigation activities, Vol. 1–2 and Appendices, Washington DC: National Institute of Building Sciences, 2005 and 2) H. Kunreuther and E. Michel-Kerjan, Challenge paper: Natural disasters – Policy options for reducing losses from natural disasters: Allocating \$75 billion, Revised version for Copenhagen Consensus, Pennsylvania: Center for Risk Management and Decision Processes, University of Pennsylvania, 2012. Conflict ratio of 1:4 based on M. Chalmers, Spending to save? The cost-effectiveness of conflict prevention, Defence and Peace Economics, 18(1), 2007
10. Development Initiatives, 2015, Op. cit.
11. Ibid. This is an estimate based on approved mission budgets of UN missions only.
12. Civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention and resolution data taken from Creditor Reporting System (CRS), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=CRS1>, accessed 20 May 2016
13. Development Initiatives, 2015, Op. cit.

Written by Janani Vivekananda and Shreya Mitra

About International Alert

International Alert helps people find peaceful solutions to conflict. We are one of the world's leading peacebuilding organisations, with 30 years of experience laying the foundations for peace. We work with local people around the world to help them build peace, and we advise governments, organisations and companies on how to support peace. Find out more at www.international-alert.org

© International Alert 2016. All graphics © International Alert except figures 3 and 5 adapted from © adelphi

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without full attribution.

Design and illustrations by D.R. ink. Graphics: People © Shutterstock; Parents and children © Telnov Oleksii/Shutterstock; Sun © andromina/Shutterstock; Globe © yayha/Shutterstock; Bus © B Sanja/Shutterstock; Fire © Santitep Mongkolsin/Shutterstock; Protestors © Reinke Fox/Shutterstock

International Alert.

346 Clapham Road, London SW9 9AP, United Kingdom

Tel +44 (0)20 7627 6800, Fax +44 (0)20 7627 6900

Email info@international-alert.org

www.international-alert.org

Registered charity no. 327553

 /InternationalAlert

 @intalert

ISBN: 978-1-911080-25-1