Roanne van Voorst and Dorothea Hilhorst

Humanitarian action in disaster and conflict settings

Insights of an expert panel

International Institute of Social Studies

Erasmus

Table of Contents

Authors

Roanne van Voorst
Institute of Social Sciences, The Hague and Erasmus University

Dorothea Hilhorst
Institute of Social Sciences, The Hague and Erasmus University

Executive summary

This report is part of a large research project on humanitarian aid in settings of conflict and disaster. It aims to help scholars and aid practitioners to understand better, from a practitioner's view point, the complexity and perverse outcomes that characterise the engagement of the international aid sector with local political realities in conflict settings – and to understand better how to deal with them.

The report records the insights that were drawn from two rounds of an expert panel, in which 30 key humanitarian actors with great experience in the field participated. We used a so-called Delphi method (see Introduction chapter), which has a cyclical research design with several rounds of questioning. In the first round of the research, participants were interviewed for one to three hours over Skype or face-to-face. In the second round, this was followed up by additional questions by email or phone that had emerged from the analysis of the first round.

The goal of the expert panel was to establish an informed, evidence-based study about some of the most pressing challenges that are currently hampering the effectiveness of aid, as well as to collect observations of highly experienced practitioners on trends and recent experiences in the field. In particular, emphasis was placed on 'best practices' and success factors for aid projects in different conflict settings, new actors and coalitions in the aid industry, and insights on the usefulness of new technologies and other promising dynamics. We end the chapter by raising a set of new questions and proposing a workshop with selected participants, in which these questions can be discussed. Below we share some of the insights generated by the panel, categorised by chapter and theme.

Chapter 1: challenges and best practices per conflict setting

- The types of challenges that practitioners encounter in their disaster aid programs, differ significantly in different conflict settings.

  · For High Intensity Conflict (HIC) Settings, the most pressing challenges are lack of basic infrastructure, logistics, lack of access, overwhelming amounts of work due to the involvement of relatively few aid organisations in the area, and the high level of population movement.

  · For low Intensity Conflict (LIC) Settings, the most pressing challenges experienced by our panel members are funding scarcity, differing priorities between state and INGOs, the unsustainability of programs, overstretching INGO portfolios to get funding, and the low capacity of local actors in combination with a high turnover of international staff.

  · In Post Conflict (PC), the most pressing challenges include the overwhelming number of INGOs and competition amongst them, culturally inappropriate programs, the lack of (effective) exit plans, lack of basic infrastructure, and the existence of political sensitivities and lingering conflict below the surface that cannot be openly considered or reported.

Participating aid agencies

Action Against Hunger
Adeso
AMEL association
Association for Aid and Relief, Japan
CARE International
Community Healthcare Initiative
Coordination of Afghan Relief (CoAR)
ICRC
IFRC
Lebanon Ssupport
MercyCorps
MSF
Oxfam Novib
Save the Children
SEED India
UNICEF
UNOCHA
World Food Program

- The types of projects that are most effective also differ per conflict setting, as do the strategies that practitioners use to create and run successful programs.

  - In HIC settings, projects that are mobile and adaptive work best. While it is a common belief that in HIC settings, humanitarian aid should be prioritised over development programs, about half of our panel members believed otherwise. They suggested that despite conflict, donors and aid actors should prioritise conflict resolution and development programs over humanitarian aid, as aid is perceived to be unsustainable and ineffective in these settings – or even counterproductive - because it may feed into conflict.

  - Always struggling with access and overwhelmed, a common strategy used by practitioners in HIC settings, in order to make sure their projects are regarded as successful by peers and donors, is to lower expectations and/or strictly define projects.

  - In LIC settings, the most effective projects are the ones that are firmly grounded in local context and characterised by cultural understanding of the country experience. A common success strategy for practitioners is to work on sensitive issues under the surface, through local networks and local NGOs, in order to avoid disturbing good relations with the government.

  - In PC settings, projects focusing on long-term development and prevention are evaluated as best. Successful strategies include working with civil society groups, ideally with clear exit plans, though this is rather rare.

Chapter 2: Challenges internal to aid industry

- One major problem that hinders the aid industry in all types of conflict settings is that a gap exists between the types of actions and solutions that practitioners believe will help to solve or improve major issues in their sector, and the actual decisions and actions they take to deal with problems in daily practice. The reason for this problem/solution gap lies in the limited room for manoeuvre that practitioners have. Many of their strategies ensure resilience in the individual agencies, but are not effective in ensuring the quality of the aid system in the long run. This finding suggests that, in order for practitioners to improve the aid system, they need more room for manoeuvre in the field.

  - Trying to deal with bureaucratic challenges and the disadvantages of the financial structure of the aid system, practitioners often find creative ways to get funding and use it flexibly; and they are being less transparent about their actual activities in donor reports.

  - Instead of moving away from individual projects and focussing on knowledge transfers and transparency/government processes (which would be the logical direction for the aid industry to go, according to most panellists), practitioners constantly make small amendments to projects and their own ways of working in the hope that 'this time', it will work.

- While there is a lot of talk about localisation and increased cooperation, in the daily practice in the field, we found that humanitarians adhere to 'othering' strategies as a means of legitimacy. While international staff question whether it is ever possible for local staff to be completely 'neutral' in a conflict, local staff raise similar questions about their foreign colleagues.

Chapter 3: North-South differences

- There exists a huge difference in the ways Northern, larger INGO employees and practitioners working for Southern, local NGOs regard the status quo in the sector. Although this 'gap' is by no means a new topic, a relevant contribution to this debate is the consistent difference in perceptions that we found between aid actors working for larger INGOs and local NGOs working in areas characterised by conflict and disaster.

- This differentiated experience pertains especially to the ways in which the localisation agenda is working in practice, particularly with regard to the issues of subcontracting versus partnerships, and the extent to which local practitioners trust the outcomes of international policy meetings.

- Another 'gap' was found in opinions on the involvement of so-called 'new' aid actors, donor governments and private sector agents. While it is a great concern of all practitioners that aid agencies are gradually being side-lined by private sector actors and foreign governments, particularly the 'new' donor states, there is relatively little long-term and transnational cooperation with these new aid actors. While practitioners with a Northern background generally regard the involvement of private sector actors as inevitable but problematic because they do not adhere to humanitarian principles, panel members with a Southern background tend to regard this as a strength as it allows for fast and large-scale interventions that improve infrastructure and development. These panel members also pointed out that the concept 'humanitarian aid' itself is a Northern concept. In their daily work and in communication with local aid actors, they prefer to avoid the term and instead speak of partnerships and development, as these concepts resonate more in the local context.

- Because of the disappointment with outcomes of the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) and other commitments, local Southern NGOs are currently establishing and working through interest groups and consortia to pursue their own agenda. In some cases, these prove successful in pulling more power and funding opportunities towards local aid organisations.

Introduction

The shortcomings of the humanitarian sector have been well rehearsed. The flaws that are usually at the top of the list include unresponsive and politicised funding, politicised implementation, weak accountability to crisis-affected people, poor leadership and coordination, and inadequate involvement of national and local actors in affected countries. The proposed solutions to these problems have also been debated and are widely known: the Grand Bargain holds that in 2020 what needs to be established is more cooperation between aid actors (e.g. by pooled funding and buy-ins) to make aid more cost-efficient, more ownership of aid by local organisations as these can provide cheaper and more sustainable aid, more cash to mobile, vulnerable communities such as refugees and internally displaced people, less designated funding (in 2020 only 30% should be designated), and more transparency among NGOs about how they spend money. Another solution that has been proposed by aid actors and policy makers is known as 'adaptive programming', or the need to create programs that suit the local context and situation at a specific time.

We aim to contribute to these debates in four main ways:
1. First, this report systematically distinguishes between different aid scenarios. While most writing on humanitarian aid is general in nature, or distinguishes only between natural disaster and conflict, this research distinguishes between high intensity conflict, low intensity conflict and post-conflict scenarios.
2. Secondly, the research was based on anonymous in-depth interviews with key actors in the field of humanitarian aid. Only the researchers know who participated in the research. This allowed people to speak openly about their main concerns, their observations and their wishes for the future – even if their opinions referred to peers or donors in the highly-competitive aid industry.
3. Thirdly, while it is an often-heard concern that in recent international policy discussions about the future of the aid industry, the voices of Southern or smaller NGOs remained largely unheard: in this study half of the interviewees work for such aid organisations. We consciously selected these interviewees in order to balance the Northern dominance in many other reports and found that their voices, indeed, provided a rather different perspective on the current state of the aid industry. We elaborate this difference throughout the chapters.
4. Fourthly, we have taken a bottom-up perspective and collected experience-based opinions and ideas, rather than top-down policy proposals. This provides a more concrete character to the insights on the status of the aid sector. We mention in this report those points we deem most pressing but which are not given enough emphasis in other writings and debates, and we refer to academic and political literature where useful and appropriate.

ReShapeAid was supposed to happen in 2016: it saw the launch of a number of important initiatives including the Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative, the Charter 4 Change on localisation, and the NEAR network of southern NGOs. It was also the year of the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS). This gathering, however, failed to live up to its enormous hype. Many practitioners and policy makers appeared disappointed with the resulting *Grand Bargain*, which included plans for a host of important humanitarian issues ranging from transparency to multi-year funding, from less earmarking and more localisation to greater collaboration between humanitarian and development actors. These largely overlap with the recommendations in the Sendai Framework of Action (UNISDR, 2016), which lists sixteen prerequisites for recovery that are designed to leave people better off in a number of ways, reduce losses from disasters, and produce outside interventions that, at least, 'do no harm' (Anderson, 1999; see also Vale and Campanella, 2005; Davis and Alexander, 2016). Although practitioners and other actors involved in the aid industry generally agree that these recommendations make sense, it is also widely believed that the issue is still implementation. Moreover, while stakeholders committed themselves to hundreds of new resolutions, it remains highly questionable to what extent these commitments will be followed up, since many states do not recognise the outcomes of the WHS, which was not an official summit. Many practitioners are therefore extremely sceptical about the practical outcomes of these and other high-level policy meetings and agreements.

This report is not the end of this study but merely an intermediate step in a larger research project on humanitarian aid in settings of conflict and disaster which will end in 2020. In the twentieth century and, so far, in the twenty-first, many damaging natural disasters have taken place in zones of violent conflict (Wisner 2012) and failed or very weak governance. If one considers not only large-scale violence but also situations where criminal extortion, petty (and grand) corruption and other forms of structural violence are chronic, recovery from specific disasters in a great number of cities must be understood as complex and difficult. This report is one way to understand better, from a practitioner's view point, the complexity and perverse outcomes that characterise the engagement of the international aid sector with local political realities in conflict settings – and how to deal with them.

Methodology

This report records the insights that were drawn from two rounds of an expert panel, in which 30 key humanitarian actors with great experience in the field participated.
The expert panel contributes to the case studies by offering the longer-term, overall views of aid practice. They all have at least 7 years of experience in the field, mostly working for different INGOs or humanitarian think thanks and almost always have experience in several crises involving conflict and disaster. They were all interviewed for 1-3 hours over Skype or face-to-face and, as is common in a so-called Delphi study (we explain the advantages and characteristics of this methodology below), the first interview was followed up with additional questions by email or phone in a later round. The goal of the Delphi study was to establish an informed, evidence-based study about some pressing questions. What are the circumstances under which disasters do catalyse peace and conflict? What challenges do humanitarian agencies encounter in situations where natural disasters and conflict meet? How are institutions impacted by disaster interventions, and what can and should be the role of humanitarian aid in this process? What more is needed for humanitarian agencies to work effectively in different scenarios and settings?

The advantage of the cyclical structure of a Delphi study is that it allows participants to reflect on their earlier answers and it allows the researcher to ask additional questions throughout the interview process if these appear relevant. This method is useful in studies where judgmental information is indispensable (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004; see also Turoff, 2002). A Delphi study allows for group thinking on a problem that cannot be solved by 'facts' but that might be enlightened by the subjective opinions of experts. Moreover, it avoids the potential negative consequences of a group interview and it allows people to speak openly and thoughtfully. In our study, we chose not to work with questionnaires, as is most common, but with semi-structured in- depth interviews. All interviewees remained anonymous to other participants, so that everybody could speak freely.

A Delphi study does not depend on a statistical sample that attempts to be representative of any population. It is a tool intended to gather insights from a group of qualified experts who have deep understanding of the issues. One of the most critical factors for a valuable outcome is the selection of the key informants (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004). In our study, we selected 30 qualified experts (the number of participants was based on recommendations from the literature on the Delphi technique) through a snowballing method. We first asked a committee of highly-experienced practitioners and aid-scholars whom they believed were well-experienced 'reflective practitioners' that we should talk to, approached those people to be interviewed, and then asked each selected participant for new, highly recommended names.

In the first round, which took place between October 2016 and January 2017, each participant was interviewed. In the second round (February and March 2017), important overlaps and differences between answers were analysed and participants were asked to comment and reflect on specific questions that emerged from the analysis. These follow-up questions were asked over the phone, through Skype, or on the internet: 24 people participated in the follow-up round and six indicated they were too busy. All interviews were directly transcribed and stored in the software analysis program *Nvivo*, together with the audio files.
A third round will follow in 2018: a selected group of panellists will be invited for a group discussion around different response scenarios for different conflict/disaster settings. In this group discussion, the aim is to establish some sort of consensus over what works best in which type of conflict setting.

Timetable and design of Delphi methodology

Activities	Period	Key participants
Formulation of research questions and themes for discussion	March - August 2016	Research team (Dorothea Hilhorst and Roanne van Voorst)
Pre-selection of candidates	February - August 2016	Research team and committee of five practitioners and aid-scholars
Testing of research questions	August-October 2016	Research team & committee of five practitioners and aid-scholars
Round 1: interviews	October 2016 - January 2017	30 informants
Analysis of data round 1	December 2016 - February 2017	Research team
Round 2: interviews	February and March 2017	24 (out of 30) informants
Analysis of data round 2	March 2017	Research team
Writing Intermediary Report	March and April 2017	Research team
Round 3: workshop/group discussion	TBA in 2018	Research team and selected participants from panel

Of the 30 informants, 50 % was male, 50 % was female. The youngest participant was 32, the oldest 65. Participants had varying ethnic backgrounds: the USA, Spain, UK, Poland, Slovakia, the Netherlands, France, Kenya, India, South-Sudan, Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Japan and Colombia. They work for organisations including MSF, ICRC, Save the Children, Oxfam Novib, Adeso, UNICEF, UNOCHA, WFP, MercyCorps, CoARC, Action against Hunger, SEED India, Lebanon-support, Community Healthcare Initiative, CARE, AAR, and AMEL. The settings in which they were professionally engaged in humanitarian aid are, amongst others, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Nepal, Liberia, India, Kenya, South Sudan, Sudan, Yemen, Ethiopia, Cambodia, Darfur, Haiti, Pakistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Iraq, Colombia, Nigeria, Syria, Turkey and Somalia.

Structure of the report

Chapter 1 introduces three types of conflict settings (high-conflict, low-conflict and post-conflict settings) and discusses the most important challenges that aid practitioners come across in these settings. One of the important findings of this survey is that different types of crisis bring with them different types of challenges for humanitarians. We also shed light on the best practices for each of these scenarios.

Chapter 2 discusses important problems that exist across the different types of conflict settings. They relate to the aid sector itself, rather than to the type of conflict setting in which aid is being provided. One problem concerns the enormous difference in perception and experience of large Northern INGOs, and smaller, Southern, national/local NGOs. A second theme we discuss concerns the gap between what aid practitioners envisage as solutions to the challenges the aid industry is currently facing and the types of decisions and strategies that they are able to use in their daily work in the field. The difference between what they think should be done, and what they actually do, suggests that for aid to become more effective, practitioners need more space for adaptive management of their projects.

Chapter 3 discusses our findings on differences in perceptions of the current state of the aid industry. We consider in particular, opinions about the localisation agenda, engagements with private sector actors and partnerships, and interest groups and consortia that are being established amongst smaller NGOs.

The report ends with a set of new questions that emerge from the analysis and proposes next steps.

1

Challenges and best-practices in different conflict settings

1.1 Categorisation of conflict

Much of the scholarly and political attention on situations where disasters and conflict collide treats conflict as a singular unit, disregarding the diversity in conflict conditions and disaster response challenges (Hilhorst 2015). However, this research aimed to investigate the premise that the nexus of disaster and conflict and the responses of international and country-based actors largely depend on the type of conflict situation where the disaster occurs. We distinguish three types of conflict scenarios: high-intensity conflicts, low-intensity conflicts and post-conflict scenarios. Of course, it should be noted that conflict is dynamic and complex: in reality, a country that is formally regarded to be in a post-conflict state, may experience insurgencies or violent eruptions. Hence, the boundaries between high, low, or post conflict are fuzzy – and we acknowledge that. Nevertheless, in this report we stick to the categorisation both for analytic purposes and, more importantly, because the analysis shows that all the expert panellists agree that the challenges and experiences they encounter in different conflict-settings differ greatly. We elaborate on these differences after providing a brief definition for each conflict-setting.

In high-intensity conflicts, violence occurs on a large scale, and the authorities have a high level of involvement in conflict and/or little effective control over the country. Current examples are Somalia, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Central African Republic and South Sudan. Disasters in areas of high-intensity conflict have a major impact on local populations and their institutions. They are often impoverished and vulnerable after years of stagnating development and state negligence and are then further challenged by the multiple jeopardies of conflict and disaster. Aid agencies find it difficult or impossible – due to perilous conditions or security restrictions – to operate in these areas (Healy & Tiller 2014) and often resort to the controversial method of 'remote control', where the delivery of aid is sub-contracted to local actors and the monitoring and accountability of aid can therefore not be guaranteed (Donini & Maxwell 2014).

Low-intensity conflicts, in contrast, have fewer deaths and are less intense than open conflict. Violence is more sporadic or in stalemate, and the government continues to be functional in large parts of the territory. Current examples include the borderlands between Pakistan and India (Kashmir), Ethiopia, Myanmar, Mindanao in the Philippines, North-East India and the Palestinian territories. The government may be involved in the conflict (civil war) or may be an outsider to the conflict (non-state conflict). States in these areas are often contested by competing political factions, who may seek to engage in disaster response to enhance their legitimacy. Aid in these contexts may be particularly prone to accusations of being uneven and partisan.

In post conflict settings, a political settlement has formally been reached, and the reconstruction process is underway. In reality, conflict may linger, and there is a large risk of resuming conflict. Current examples include Nepal, Haiti, Guatemala, Colombia, Sri Lanka and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Post-conflict areas are often associated with weak or fragile states. The state in these areas is often incapable of responding to the disaster. Civil society may have assumed state functions or may be equally weakened because of the conflict. There is a high density of aid actors to deal with state building and recovery of infrastructure and services.

1.2 Main challenges per conflict setting

High-intensity Conflict Settings	Low Intensity Conflict Settings	Post Conflict Settings
Lack of basic infrastructure	Funding scarcity	INGOs and competition are overwhelmed
Logistics	Differing priorities state vs INGOs	Culturally inappropriate programs
Lack of access	Unsustainability of programs Overstretching of INGO portfolios to get funding	No exit program
Too few aid organisations in area – those which are there feel overburdened	Low capacity local actors and high rotation of international staff	Lack of basic infrastructure
High population movements		Political sensitivities below surface that cannot be openly considered 'conflict' or reported about

1.2.1 High-intensity conflict (HIC) settings

The main challenge for effective aid as experienced by aid practitioners in high-conflict settings is getting access to beneficiaries, either for security reasons or due to the lack of basic infrastructure in the country. Security can be threatened by ongoing fighting, or by (competing) authorities who disagree with the interventions of foreign aid actors. While the problem of access in high-conflict settings is by no means new or unknown, there are a few recent developments and discussions worth mentioning on the theme.

70% of the interviewees indicated that they believe that INGOs have lost their neutral status over the past decade. This finding is consistent with what has been referred to in other reports as the eroding respect for the rules of war, and the apparent increase of mistrust of NGO neutrality (cf. WHDT, 2016; INSO, 2017). As a result, INGOs work more and more often through remote control. One obvious downside is that practitioners don't know precisely what is needed or what is going on in the country where their projects are being implemented and it raises the ethical issue of sending out local staff to dangerous areas.

If aid organisations do work in-country, they only do so with armed security. There were no participants in this study who worked in HIC settings without armed security, not even if the official policy of their organisation is a 'no-arms' one, and not even if the organisation formally asks to work only through unarmed, local population acceptance. In reality, everyone seeks protection – be it through cooperation with UN soldiers, local police or military, private security companies or local armed guards. While some organisations work with large international security companies and adhere to formalised safety rules, others try to ensure their safety in more covert and informal ways: they strike deals with (armed) local communities, who guarantee aid workers' safety in return for aid for their village or area.

Another way for aid actors to ensure their safety, is by strategically emphasising their 'neutrality' in public. This is done consistently in verbal communication with conflict actors, authorities, local staff within the aid organisation, and beneficiaries, who are all being told strategically about the humanitarian principles and how these are being taken into account by the respective organisation. The same message is also communicated non-verbally. About half of the expert panellists in this study who work in high-conflict areas told us that they make a conscious effort not to be associated with the US, the UN, or the EU. While they often do receive money from either those parties, they will not flaunt it or openly admit it to recipients or report on it to the host government. One participant explained that in his organisation, this was described as *"being subtle about telling who pays you"* and another said, *"we get massive funding from the EU, but having their stickers on our trucks would be suicide"*. If they cooperate with these parties for their projects, or if they are protected by affiliated troops, they make an effort not to let this become known locally. Some INGOs claim openly to work on a non-armed basis and insist they are completely autonomous from the UN, while in reality they are paying UN-troops security experts who are familiar with their wish to be protected but not to be associated with foreign troops.

Next to security, another main access challenge mentioned by all interviewees with experience in high-conflict settings was the lack of basic infrastructure in the countries where they work, and the related logistics problems. According to 90% of the respondents, this problem is perhaps the major issue that needs be resolved for aid to become more effective in these countries. The following quotes are characteristic of what we heard on this topic:

Male country director of large INGO, age 58:

'Our main constraint is not so much the war itself, or struggles with authorities, but logistics. There are no roads, flying is too expensive, it's very hard to find trucks, to find drivers who are willing to take their trucks to some areas. Ask me what I need mostly to make aid more effective and my answer is not money, nor better access – which is what donors and basically everybody always thinks - it's good roads."

Female project manager of large INGO, age 35:

"Logistics is definitely the main problem. [...] I'm ashamed to say this but we have situations where for 6 months we cannot send any staff to an area where we have a program running, and so we start projects and then have no idea how these projects and the people affected by it are doing."

Male project manager of large INGO, age 38:

"We have enough money, to be honest. This country gets a lot of media attention, so finding donors is not our problem. Our problem is that we cannot do much with the money as long as this country is not economically developed. I feel forced to spend the money on projects that we all know are not sustainable. Which makes me sad and ashamed, even when just saying this now. It's difficult."

Male head of office of large INGO, age 42:

"Donors keep giving us money for individual projects, but what we would really need here is good roads. Listen, our projects on governance and health do some good and for that reason I would not like to see them stop. But honestly, for things to get radically better here? Let donors invest in large infrastructure programs, for several years in a row. Economic development, that is."

Four participants took this concern one step further, questioning the relevance of longer-term humanitarian aid in high-conflict settings as a whole, arguing that in such settings, economic development should be prioritised together with conflict resolution:

Female director of local NGO, age 48:

"Places like South Sudan or Somalia, where there are almost no roads and many locations are cut off from everybody for six months of the year (...) The fact that we're still spending so much on aircrafts and helicopters to get access to the people...It's unacceptable after 25 years of the international community being there! If we would stop being engaged in band-aid, and start investing in infrastructure and long-term economic growth of such countries, even if we would still have a fragile state and political system, at least that investment will have a positive outcome. Around economic activities, entrepreneurship, and eventually on humanitarian response itself."

Female advisor of UN/OCHA, age 33:

"In countries with complete breakdown of state authority, I've come to believe that there is very little space for humanitarian actors. There is really only space for development actors. Otherwise you're going to end up offering emergency response for another 35 years. And that is not solving the problem. I mean: look at all the capacity building programs that have existed in high-conflict areas for so long. Surely after so much capacity building, there should be capacity? How INGOs keep doing their work now is very unconvicing."

If the idea to prioritise development models (together with political solutions to establish peace) in conflict settings over humanitarian aid may seem counter intuitive, that opinion appeared not uncommon in our panel. About a quarter of the panellists (7 out of 30) fully agreed with this statement – even if that meant that less money would become available for the provision of humanitarian aid.

A larger group (19 panellists) agreed that development should be invested in more than it has been recently but emphasised that this should not negatively impact the current provision of aid to disaster and/or conflict victims. Four out of 30 panellists disagreed with both statements: they believed that in HIC settings, the number one priority should be the provision of humanitarian aid and that only after conflict has ended does it make sense for donors and aid actors to start prioritising development.

Of course, the problems of security and lack of infrastructure are not unique for high-intensity conflict settings. They also exist in more stable settings. When an earthquake struck Nepal

in 2015, it took aid workers days to reach affected communities because roads had been destroyed, or because communities were located in remote areas. And while a country such as Haiti is not formally considered a conflict country, much of the aid work is slowed down by negotiations with local authorities and gangs and safety is a serious concern for aid organisations. So, a lack of basic infrastructure and issues around access and security can and do play a role also in low-intensity or post conflict settings. However, our analysis shows that practitioners prioritise different problems for different conflict settings.

1.2.2 Low-intensity conflict (LIC) settings

In LIC -settings, one main problem is that humanitarian actors' activities are monitored and controlled by governments that may have different priorities from those of the international aid community. This can pertain to uneven distribution of aid and also to the type of aid that is delivered. We heard frequently from our panellists that while governments in the low-intensity conflict settings are most interested in INGOs and donors paying for economic development projects, aid actors themselves are trying to push either institutional building projects, or relief programs to vulnerable populations, for example to Internally Displaced People. While all aid actors in low-intensity settings emphasise their cooperation with governments and only support what the state initiates and manages, it also became clear that they do much 'under the radar' in order to pursue their humanitarian agenda. For example, aid to conflict-affected IDP's is often not provided overtly in order not to disturb work relations with the government.

In cases where the government denies the existence of a vulnerable group (this is for example the case with IDPs in some countries), the most common strategy for aid actors to reach them is to subcontract local NGOs and provide them with money under a less-sensitive name ('unexpected emergencies' was one we heard, 'neglected emergencies' another). Another strategy was to work directly with regional authorities or ministries, rather than with national governments. In cases where a government admits that this group exists but claims that they have fled poverty or disaster, not conflict, the most common strategy to implement aid programs for IDPs is to consciously use vague language in government reports and meetings about these programs. They also make sure they do not discuss out loud sensitive topics in the office if local staff are around as some of them also work for the government and/or are expected to inform the government. Similar strategies were used for other vulnerable groups that aid actors encounter in LIC settings, namely refugees and ethnic minorities.

There thus exists a duality between what might be called the public face of humanitarian actors – in which humanitarians partner up with the government and only run aid programs that are initiated or accepted by the government – and the covert face, in which they feel restricted by the government and apply strong self-censorship in public communication, while working 'under the radar' on more sensitive topics. It is emphasised in all outward communication that the government should take the lead in aid in their country and INGOs are only there to support: words such as 'trust-building', 'partnership', 'cooperation' are common. When speaking about the covert face, 'keeping your head down' was a phrase often used in our interviews and 'not making noise', another one. The following quotes are typical examples of what the expert panellists told us:

Male field officer of INGO, aged 34:

"The strategy we're using, rather than making noise is for example going to local levels. My relationship with the local government is better [than with the national government]. Rather than taking issues up to higher level, then issues become very problematic. So I chose not to take it up, but just work without making any noise. Also sometimes I go directly through local NGOs, ask them to address these issues."

Female field officer, aged 42:

"You just need to keep your head down. The government is monitoring all that we do and of course we need to work with them. We want to; we don't want to be the arrogant, outside-intervener, right? And many things are going well, we are building trust and partnering up. But there are issues and groups of people about which they [government] just don't care, and we do. And we don't want to ruin the trust we just built...So we keep our work on those things a bit more silent, just do it but keeping our heads down."

Male advisor of INGO consortium, aged 62:

"Sometimes the way is not to work at the central level but to work at the local level, because at the local level people are much more concerned with what happens to the populations, then at the level of the [national] government. So we have been pushing for local involvement, with local actors: the local government, like mayors...sometimes municipalities, or local groups [...] they are closer to the people, they are our brothers and sisters on board."

Female project manager, aged 42:

"We are always working with the government. But... the context of disaster relief here is so corrupt that it became a joke, basically. There have been massive investments, of the UN and the international donor community, in the national aid organisations here. Which were run by the Prime Minster's wife and were widely known to favour areas that were politically supportive of their party. [...] There were little additional funds responses for us to actually implement. [...] Ultimately, that reflected on the quality of the aid we provided, yes, for sure. Those were real consequences of the decision to invest more in local government structures."

Male field officer, aged 34:

"The big problem is [...] sensitivity of the issues. When you are dealing with cholera, we don't use that word: we say instead diarrhoea. Or with Internally Displaced People, we call them vulnerable or flood-affected people. So with that understanding we work together with the government."

These quotes validate our finding that in low-intensity conflict settings, building trust with governments, not disturbing good or improving relationships, and being allowed to work in a country are prioritised by aid actors over addressing politically sensitive issues.

Another main problem mentioned by all expert panellists with experience in LIC settings, is the scarce funding. If aid actors in high-profile settings complained that they have sufficient money but need roads, these actors work in countries that have a low-profile in donor rankings and media, and even INGO staff consider them 'old news'. Consequently, aid agencies in low-intensity conflicts work in an environment characterised by donor scarcity, limited funding opportunities, and a high turnover of international staff. This is problematic as the humanitarian needs in low-intensity conflict settings are generally still pressing and capacity remains sometimes low at the local level. In order to get access to funding, we found that INGOs tend to (over)stretch their portfolios, which makes them able to respond to a variety of funding calls and increases their chances of acquiring funds. However, it also lures them into doing things in which they are not experts and that in turn impacts the quality of aid.

Female project manager, age 42:

"Ideally we come up with a program strategy, identify what are the underlying causes of poverty, what are your strategies to address them, so you get a long-term development plan. And then you bring in donors to support different parts of that. That's the ideal world. The reality of that is that donors also have their own priorities, and as we need money to be able to operate we often end up doing work, particularly in these countries where there is a challenging funding environment, we often end up doing work that doesn't exactly relate to what we do."

Male evaluation-officer, aged 34:

"Here is the problem: when an international NGO has specific capacities like for example WASH, when they receive money, they can do it succesfully. But when they compete for WASH-calls without having the capacity, and they win that funding, than that delays project time, also undermines the overall response and quality of implementation. And I find this now happens a lot."

Female director of NGO, aged 45:

"Nowadays cash-voucher programs are becoming popular. Many donors have money available for that. Suddenly, all the NGOs around us are writing proposals for cash-programs. And then they get the money and have no clue how to go about it! They come to us and ask us how we did it – as we have experience with it – and I am like: why do you promise to do that program if you can't actually make it true?"

Male field officer of INGO, aged 38:

"I have to admit… I am embarrassed about this but… I have accepted money for things that we were really not experts in. But if you need money, and sponsors have it available for a certain program, then it is just so hard to say 'no we can't do that'. So you take it. And then in hindsight, you see you did not do it in the most effective way and maybe I should not have taken it."

Female lobbyist for NGO, aged 32:

"One of the first things I learned when I started in this organisation is to write proposals in such a way that it suits the program a donor has money available for. Not that we take things that we cannot do at all…but we might start programs that are new to us, because there is money for that available and not for the things that we are more familiair with."

Finally, in LIC settings it is perceived as a huge problem that humanitarian aid is often unsustainable. Though this problem was also recognised in HIC settings, it was not considered a priority problem. In the word of one male informant (47):

"Humanitarian durable solutions to me are kind-of cute, but they are not effective. Here, we need […] to try and raise people's basic indicators."

1.2.3 Post-conflict (PC) settings

Post-conflict settings are generally considered safer and 'easier' areas in which to work by sponsors and other aid actors in the international community. Therefore, a disaster can cause an influx of money, organisations and international staff that may overwhelm a government. Once in, practitioners typically manoeuvre in a political environment characterised by the scars of civil war, and the inherited structures of political processes. They have to engage with weak governance which is heavily dependent on external donors and experts, as well as with competing political parties, civil society groups or other authorities.

The main challenges our panellists encounter in post conflict settings are 1) overwhelming numbers of sponsors and aid organisations on the ground and the resulting competition between them, 2) the fact that aid cannot be separated from development and institution-building. While this latter challenge is of course also true for high- and low-intensity conflict settings, it can be argued that the expectations of what aid can or should do in post-conflict countries are highest and go furthest beyond relief. As humanitarian actors in these settings find they can't do it all successfully, the effectiveness of their work is sometimes questioned – by outsiders as well as by themselves. 3) the high politics of aid, and the little space to openly discuss this with state actors and donors, and 4) the lack of an exit strategy.

As the first and second point are well-known and have been described in other academic and policy literature, we will elaborate on the third and fourth points (politicisation of aid and the lack of exit strategies) in this report.

Our panellist explained that in the post conflict settings where they work, the highly political 'game' of aid is sometimes underemphasised or not even acknowledged by donors or aid agencies. This can and does have an impact on the effectiveness of their programs. Political struggles, such as a state asserting power in an attempt to counterbalance the influx of outsiders, can delay response; political opponents of a state may claim or hamper foreign aid as a way to protest against the government and gain legitimacy. Several participants of this study admitted that they found post conflict settings such as Nepal and Haiti more complex to work in, than countries officially considered to be affected by ongoing conflict. In the latter, the political sensitivities were at least out in the open and known by most sponsors and aid actors in the field. That was not always the case in countries where a peace agreement has been signed, but where tensions still linger. In these cases, aid actors are expected to work

with 'the authorities' whereas in reality the governments' legitimacy and capacity is challenged in various ways.

Former coordinator of international mission in post conflict setting, male, aged 58:

> "There were these weak government structures (...) and so many problems with civil society organisations. One colleague of mine had to negotiate with 20 gang members before he could rebuild a school that had collapsed! The weaknesses were just so inherent in the government (...) So we did what we could, but not always with the government, although we tried wherever they had capacity and power. But otherwise we just had to move fast... Now there is this ongoing debate as to whether this was an opportunity to strengthen an extraordinarily weak governance system, and were the opportunities to strengthen those, missed? I think we have to say yes to those questions. But the other perspective is also true: focusing on relief, we did save a lot of lives in the period directly after the disaster, and this country's government was much more of a mess than was recognized by the international audience criticizing us."

Senior advisor of middle-large NGO, female, aged 45:

> "The problem is that we don't know what we mean by relief or development, while we keep talking about it. For UNDP development is working with governments. But when you're in an environment where the government has zero capacity (...) or interest in an area that is politically disenfranchised, in reality you are not working with the government. You are working with communities and trying to give them access to basic services, water and food, and at the same you try to work with local authorities to give them some capacity to fulfil their role (...) Is that humanitarian? Or development? I have no idea!"

Female project manager for large INGO, aged 37:

> "We often had the feeling that the government was working against us, not with us. Our imported cars and other materials were held for weeks before we could use them, we were paying outrageous licence and import fees, and all the projects that we tried to set up were discussed by government officials for weeks and weeks. At some point my boss had been in another meeting of 5 hours or so for a tiny decision to be made that could literally save people's lives, and he shouted: 'this is ridiculous. We should just do it ourselves!'"

Male field officer of large NGO, aged 36:

> "When the earthquake happened in 2015 hundreds of aid organisations flew in, wanting to offer relief. Well-intended, but (...) they arrive here and are ignorant about the political struggles going on here and opt in for the easiest, short-term, media-genic projects. They infuriate the government, they make it harder for us to sustain good relationships with the government. Those agencies come acrooss as life-savers on television, yes, but then a next quake will occur in a few years from now, and the whole circus will start again, and the government will be more distrustful of our sector, and the sector will be accused of not having helped this country in the way it needed."
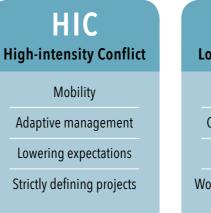
The other challenge that we want to adress in this report which was mentioned by all panellists with experience in post conflict settings, was the fact that while most agencies officially strive to make themselves redundant, in reality there hardly ever exists a clear exit strategy and it remains unclear when their job is actually 'done'. Most often, after the initial funds for a disaster have been spent, the agencies apply for more money and continue with other programs, and then yet others. In the word of a female project manager:

> "Because there is just always plenty to do for us, right? You're here, you look around you, and you see: that we can do, and that! And we keep getting money, because the sponsors find this a safe pick. So we continue with new capacity-or development programs, we just do what we can. But honestly...everyone knows that there are some countries that perhaps need the aid industry much more than this particular country, only hardly anyone is willing to work there."

1.3 Best-practices and successes per conflict setting

Despite all these challenges, our expert panellists do feel they have been engaged in successful programs and best practices in their areas of work. Our analysis of their descriptions shows that the type of projects that work best differ for high-low-post conflict settings. We discuss these best-practices per conflict setting below, and elaborate on the most important factors that, according to aid practitioners, contribute to these successes.

HIC High-intensity Conflict	LIC Low-intensity Conflict	PC Post Conflict
Mobility	Groundedness	Long-term development
Adaptive management	Cultural understanding	Prevention
Lowering expectations	Local networks	Working with civil society groups
Strictly defining projects	Working with local NGOs on sensitive issues	Exit programs

1.3.1 High-intensity Conflict (HIC) settings

HIC Best Practices	HIC Success strategies
Adaptive management	Lowering expectations
Mobile and light programs	Delimiting p[rojects

In high-intensity conflict settings, interviewees described as most successful those programs characterised by their mobility and ability to adapt. 'Adaptive management' is a concept that was mentioned by different aid actors working for different organisations in different high-conflict settings, and was praised as a way of working that is particularly suitable for fluid environments. Adaptive management entails an iterative working process, room for reflection and adjustment of the program, the freedom for people 'on the ground' to follow their gut-feelings and change things if they deem it necessary, and ideally, flexible funding (this was the case for organisations who make much use of private funding, but generally not for organisations dependent on donors). A program with mobile health clinics in South Sudan and a program involving mobile water pumps in Nigeria are concrete examples of best practice featuring adaptive management and mobility. They were both small-scale, light, and could travel fast to the areas where help was needed most: hence, they were suitable for dealing with the insurgencies that are so typical for high-conflict settings. Another overlapping characteristic of these two examples is that they were adapted half-way through. The project was moved to an area with greater need, or the project's recipients' selection criteria were amended to include host communities, instead of just Internally Displaced People. Aid workers on the ground had found that the needs among both groups had become similar.

Another example of a type of intervention that seems to work well in high conflict settings is cash programming: whether beneficiaries were paid in cash money or vouchers, cash programs were generally evaluated by our interviewees as highly successful in high-conflict settings. The only exception that was mentioned concerned an area where a local economy was hardly existent. When panellists with experience in high-conflict settings were asked for the prerequisites of what makes a project successful, the majority of their answers came down to the practice of strictly defining projects, and to the lowering of expectations towards donors, the government, peers and beneficiaries in all communication. This was a remarkable finding. Interviewees emphasised the need to 'be as predictable as possible', and to make clear what they can and – most importantly - what they cannot do. 'We've been very successful with our programs', said a logistics officer responsible for food aid, 'and I tell you this is because I am completely clear about what we can, and what we cannot do. I tell people 'no' if they ask me to do something which I am not sure we can make happen, I tell other aid agencies 'no' if they call us for help. I will say that we can't do it whenever I suspect that it goes beyond our mandate, or that it will become complex. We cannot afford to say yes and then fail. So I only say 'yes' to things that are doable for us relatively easily. That way we never get complaints afterwards. We never promise more than we give, so we are successful.' This quote reflects a strategy that seemed to be used often in HIC-settings:

Female country-officer of INGO, aged 38:

> "Ironically it was lack of access that gave us succes. Because of the security constraints we made very careful decisions about which programming we were prepared to undertake, for what were we prepared to set up staff's lives on the line. That's ultimately the decision we take everyday right? So for us the answer was, really only the programs that are life saving. So we acted very limited – but that way we made no mistakes either and all programs we did were succesfull."

Female senior advisor of INGO, aged 45:

> "So you do an assesment with the community and you tell them we come back, and you tell them when and what you will come back with and what we will do. If you do that and you do it, then that's absolutely brilliant. If you don't, that's a real problem."

Female project manager of large INGO, aged 40:

> "My projects are successful because I have learned to be superclear about what we can do for people and what not. We explain it to them: 'this is what you will get, this is what we cannot help you with.' I also tell that to authorities, I make reports to them with detailed explanation. So in hindsight we never get complaints, people are never disappointed with us."

Doing feasibility studies before implementing was another strategy to make sure that a program would not be regarded as failure in hindsight. Several panellists admitted that these studies were prioritised in their organisations over needs studies when new programs were created. In the same way as the practice of strictly defining projects, this risk-averse behaviour indicates the importance of aid organisations presenting themselves as 'successful' towards their peers and funders, and their fear of failure.

1.3.2   Low-intensity conflict (LIC) settings

LIC **Best Practices**	LIC **Success strategies**
Cultural knowledge, staff 'nativised'	Keeping head down
Longterm commitment	Working under radar
Integrated programs	Subcontracting local organisation

For low-intensity conflict areas, the best practices or most successful programs typically mentioned were not characterised by lightness and mobility, but instead by a firm grounding in the area. Long-term capacity-building programs were most frequently mentioned as a typical example of a program that aid actors deemed successful: these could be programs where governance staff was trained over a timespan of several years, or programs where communities were trained for new forms of production or livelihoods.

Aid actors in LIC settings would typically emphasise their own country experience as a success factor, with nationals referring to their backgrounds and international staff explaining that they had been in the country for several years already and could therefore be regarded 'almost a local'. This made it possible for them to work around the central government, if necessary through personal channels and networks. At the same time, trustful relations with the government were also deemed a prerequisite to be allowed to work long-term in these countries. This might seem paradoxical but working with, as well as around, the government may exactly be the strategy aid actors need in these settings.

Another frequently mentioned example of successful projects for low-intensity conflict settings were 'integrated programs'. An integrated program offers humanitarian aid and relief, plus 'softer' types of aid, such as capacity building. For example, a health clinic that set up in a crisis situation was also used to train local medical staff or a livelihood program that also involved youth empowerment. These programs were regarded as successes because they focused on people's direct needs, but also included a more long-term, and hopefully more sustainable, type of aid. As we explained in the section about challenges, the fact that many aid projects in conflict settings are not sustainable was regarded as highly problematic by panellists so these successes were exceptions rather than the norm.

Finally, features that examples of successful programs had in common included enabling aid actors to get access to a politically disenfranchised group of people (such as IDP's in Ethiopia) through partnerships or cooperation with local NGOs or other groups. Panellists explained that they deem these projects successful because they contribute to the most pressing problems in the country, which gives them a sense of legitimacy, while they avoid disturbing trustful relations with the government, which would endanger their future work.

The following quote of a male head of office of an INGO was typical of our panellists with experience in LIC settings:

"I can understand that the international audience and donors think that there are other countries that need more help because, relatively speaking, the government here is pretty strong and capable already. But to me, we are not here for all those meetings with the government, nor for the programs that we implement for them. Our most successful programs are about what we do for the people who they [the government] refuse to help. If we don't help them, nobody will. And it is needed! Look at the camps of IDP's in this country, they are in such a bad state, it is inhumane. So that's why we are needed here. Not for what the audience and donors see us doing, but for what they cannot see us doing, but we are also doing, you know what I mean?"

1.3.3 Post conflict (PC) settings

Programs that were considered a success by aid practitioners in post conflict settings were first and foremost those focussing on prevention and mitigation of disasters, rather than on disaster relief. Such programs typically take into account the fragility of the setting, and learn how people respond despite their vulnerability. Examples of perceived successful programs in post-conflict settings were rescue techniques taught to vulnerable communities and the

building of earthquake-resistant structures in Nepal. It must be noted that prevention programs are scarce in comparison with those that focus on relief. All panellists agreed that it is much harder for their agencies to get funding for prevention and mitigation, than for response but those who had been able to get funding for it, mentioned prevention programs as most valuable and effective.

Other successful programs were those in which civil society was engaged, or leading, in disaster response, particularly youth groups. These types of partnerships went well beyond what is sometimes described in policy reports as 'local participation' but what still appears in reality to be very much a top-down way of programming. In contrast, in these best-practice examples, the aid offered was, in the words of a female project manager, 'a-la-carte', rather than the 'fixed menu' style in which aid is usually offered. It was always a local group or community that would ask the agency for specific types of aid whether technical aid, financial support or expertise with the aid organisation filling in those gaps. Examples included the cooperation of several INGOs with a group of young technicians in Nepal who produced data about the earthquake accessible to aid workers, the partnering of several INGOs in Haiti with young scouts and other volunteers engaged in response and relocation efforts, and the technical aid that a group of local NGOs received when they partnered up with foreign aid actors in Lebanon.

While the panellists all agreed that ideally, humanitarian programs should have an exit strategy and be handed over to local actors after a short and successful period of acute relief, it appeared that this still hardly ever happens in reality: only two out of 30 interviewees could recall a concrete example of such a program.

Regarding success factors, interviewees brought up two different themes. One relates to the cultural, social and political knowledge of an agency and its staff. Somewhat unsurprisingly, programs that were based on thorough understanding of the local context and political sensitivities were generally evaluated as more effective and sustainable than those launched by agencies with no history in the country. Programs that were launched by outsiders new to the country that had invested in a decent stakeholder analysis were yet again ranked over those of completely ignorant outsiders.

The other success factor concerns the ability of aid agencies to stand out from the crowd in an NGO-competitive environment. Lobbying the government becomes extremely important, as is demonstrating to the authorities and media what the agency contributes to the country. It became clear from the narratives of our panellists that in PC-settings, it is the 'evidence' of usefulness for a government that legitimates an agency's continuing presence. This contrasts sharply with HIC settings, where the main legitimating factor for aid organisations are the humanitarian principles to which they claim to adhere.

Sometimes the perceived need to 'stand out' negatively impacts the quality of aid delivered in post-conflict settings. For example, the head of office of a large NGO working in Nepal explained that while he would prefer his agency to work in the most remote parts of the country, where needs are highest, he consciously chose to take up projects and attend NGO meetings in the much less-needy capital, where the government officials would take note of his organisation's activities. In his words, 'these activities were mostly useless. There are so many aid agencies here, we cannot add anything.' But he also felt confident that precisely

these projects would ensure the success of his other programs, because 'if we would be out in the countryside, we might do great stuff, but who will know about it? Not the government – they only see the organisations doing things in the capital. So I had to open an office close to the government, I have to invest in posters that we hang up here and there, I make sure that we always join government meetings. Even though this city is probably the only one in the whole country where our help is really not needed by the people.'

2

Challenges internal to aid industry

This chapter highlights types of problems that do not pertain specifically to the different types of conflict settings we distinguish, but instead exist throughout the aid sector. They were not always explicitly mentioned by our expert panel, but rather surfaced from our analysis of their narratives.

These problems concern the problem/solution dyads that exists between the type of solutions that, according to panel members, are needed to solve or improve major issues in the aid industry, and the type of solutions they seek to tackle challenges they encounter in the daily practice of their work. This discrepancy, we believe, has mainly to do with the limited level of influence practitioners have over implementing sensible solutions. Within their limited room for manoeuvre, practitioners take actions and decisions that help them overcome the daily problems experienced by their staff and agency. It is worthwhile to pay attention to these strategies. Some of them can be considered bottom-up innovations that have the potential to render aid more effective in the long run; others could be seen as coping strategies, that enable implementation in the short term at the expense of long-term effectiveness.

2.1 Major challenges and proposed solutions

When asked about the major challenges that are currently facing the aid industry, the answers of our panellists fell into three main categories: the politics of aid, bureaucracy and financial structures, and the unsustainability of programs. As these problems are well known and were also touched upon in Chapter 1 of this report, we summarise them very briefly below. In bullet points, we also present the three to five solutions mentioned most for these three categories of problems. These suggestions were proposed by panel members in response to questions such as 'what would you need in order to be able to act more effectively?' and 'what are the three things that most urgently need to change in order for the aid sector to become more effective?'

Politics of aid
Aid is increasingly politicised by all stakeholders: donors, governments, the military, non-state authorities (e.g. political opposition parties or 'rebel groups'). All claim or blame aid for their own legitimation. This makes it impossible for agencies to adhere strictly to humanitarian principles: with or without knowing, they may contribute to conflict. Even if they were completely 'neutral', they are not perceived as such by host communities. The humanitarian space is perceived to be shrinking;[1] physically in high-intensity conflict countries, discursively in low- or post conflict countries.

Proposed sensible solutions
Asked how problems concerning the 'politics of aid' could be solved, panellists came up with the following suggestions for sensible solutions:

97%
Aid should no longer be used as a weapon of war, counterterrorism or repression – not by donors, nor by receiving governments. *Mentioned by 29 out of 30 .*

90%
Issues of corruption (having to pay to contesting authorities) and the possible impact of aid on conflict should also become much more openly discussed. *Mentioned by 27 out of 30.*

83%
Donors and INGOs should acknowledge more openly that aid is not independent/neutral anymore (and probably never was). *Mentioned by 25 out of 30 .*

30%
Donors need to go back to general budget support to governments, with political conditionality linked to the enabling environment following broadly favourable policies and making information available to citizens. *Mentioned by 15 out of 30.*

23%
Aid organisations should find new ways of legitimacy, alternatives to the humanitarian principles as these are not realistic, nor necessarily relevant to recipients. *Mentioned by 7 out of 30 .*

Bureaucracy and financial structures
The incentives for aid organisations to get funding are often perverse, which leads to donor-based rather than needs-based proposal writing and accountability. Also, designated budgets do not work well in practice, trying to get funding takes too much valuable staff time and makes it harder to do work that matters in the field, and far too much of the budget is spent on international staff, the international safety rules and the security companies that agencies feel forced to work with.

Proposed sensible solutions

100%
Equal partnerships between local and international staff should become a standard. If local capacity is lacking and/or no strong civil society exists yet, international staff can lead, but only if a clear exit program exists and the agency is held accountable for following it. *Mentioned by 30 out of 30.*

87%
Future projects should include bringing in policy makers (donors) at an early stage, given the fact that practitioners are only one side of the issues/solutions currently at play. Donors can be instrumental in initiating change; complete transparency from aid agencies to donors is necessary for this step. *Mentioned by 27 out of 30.*

67%
Financial transfers need be provided in a lump sum manner (that is, not linked to individual projects), and conditional on the government. *Mentioned by 20 out of 30.*

Unsustainability of programs

Too often, projects in settings of conflict and disaster fail to address the root problems of these crises, such as weak governance/institutions and vulnerability of communities. Another reason for the unsustainability of projects is the fact that they continue to be externally driven and run by foreigners rather than locals and that clear, implemented exit plans remain scarce. This points to a major issue that hinders effective aid in today's world: the assumption that external actors have the capacity to identify the appropriate entry points and engineer reforms in the right direction, simultaneously solving both the technical policy problem and that of adapting it to political constraints.

Proposed sensible solutions

73%

Aid should become purely community-needs based (aid 'a la carte', filling in the gaps) rather than based on what donors and agencies have to offer (fixed menu) or on what is feasible and accessible. *Mentioned by 22 out of 30.*

70%

The work of INGOs should move away from individual projects and focus on processes - civil society, information and knowledge building, accountability and governance transparency programs, so that people themselves can influence governance and thus development. *Mentioned by 21 out of 30.*

53%

INGOs and donors should opt for a much more modest and general 'enabling environment' approach, getting information to citizens but acknowledging that what happens next is down to domestic politics, and largely out of their hands.[1] If, due to severe lack of capacity within a country, international staff is still needed, they may only work there with a strong focus on knowledge-transition and have to have an exit-plan to make themselves redundant – and be held accountable for executing that in responsible ways. *Mentioned by 16 out of 30.*

2.2   Alternative solutions in everyday practice

There clearly exists a willingness and capacity among practitioners to identify the main problems in the current aid industry, as well as ideal solutions for these problems. At the same time, our analysis of panellists' narratives showed a lack of room for manoeuvre for practitioners to address problems in ways that accord with the ideal solutions they envisage. A consequence of these problem/solution dyads seems to be a pattern where practitioners focus on the realms they control.

---

1 This links up to Stuti Khemani's recent World Bank-report *Making Politics Work for Development*, which argues that the best lens for understanding government failure is not democracy v authoritarianism, but 'political engagement', defined as 'the participation of citizens in selecting and sanctioning the leaders who wield power in government, including by entering themselves as contenders for leadership.' That engagement happens under both democratic and non-democratic governments, albeit in different ways.

As humanitarians perceive that things get harder, the response gap continues to increase and the humanitarian space continues to shrink, they seek alternative solutions that future-proof their own agencies by constantly trying to make them stronger, faster and better.[2] Sticking to the same three themes that we distinguished above, the strategies described below are common amongst humanitarians throughout high-, low- and post-conflict settings.

2.2.1   For dealing with the politicisation of aid

- Emphasising humanitarian principles in external communication
- Distinguishing or 'othering' between foreign and local staff (both by foreign and local staff)

Practitioners feel the need to protect the 'neutral' status of their agency for two main reasons: humanitarian principles can function as a protection blanket amidst conflicting parties, and it can serve as a justification for the presence of foreign staff and the agency itself in a country. Protection of the neutrality image happens in daily practice through regular emphasis on humanitarian principles towards stakeholders in the field, most importantly conflict actors and aid recipients.

There were exceptions: in two cases, panel members had given up on the humanitarian principles as a route to legitimacy and had tried to find alternative legitimation for themselves through personal leadership. For example, a highly experienced country officer working for an INGO in a HIC setting explained that while she used to feel that her agency served as her security blanket due to its 'neutrality', she had come to realise that her organisation was no longer perceived as such by the local community – and for good reasons: *"Nowadays, with the complexity of this conflict ... whatever you do, whoever you help, you are a part of the conflict."* Aiming to protect the safety of herself and her staff, she nowadays no longer speaks about the humanitarian principles to beneficiaries or local groups as she used to do. Instead, she has started to preface her conversations with stakeholders with her own country experience, her good network relations and thorough cultural understanding of the region and in this way to establish legitimacy for her agency. A similar strategy was used by another panel member, who worked for an INGO in a LIC setting.

Another common alternative solution that was sought by practitioners to deal with problems relating to the 'politicisation of aid' was by distinguishing between humanitarians' outsider, 'neutral' agency and local/national NGOs present in the country, who are described as 'part of the conflict' and therefore 'not neutral'. Especially in HIC-settings, local aid actors were often portrayed as 'torn between' conflict parties, or more directly as 'conflict actors'; similar descriptions were used for individual local staff – even if these people were just as often praised for their hard and good work. In LIC and PC-settings, local aid actors and organisations were also frequently described as being susceptible to the influence of conflict parties. For example, 13 out of 30 panel members (43%) explained that local partners could never be truly 'neutral' because of their ethnic or clan-background; and three out of 30 panel members (10%) said that their local staff was so poor and untrained that they almost considered it logical for them to be corrupt: *"I would do the same thing if I would be in their position. I mean, who blames a person who needs to care for his family if he does some things to increase salary? It's only logical."*

---

2 We borrow the term 'future proofing' of Sandvik (2016) who uses it for actions that humanitarians take to increase resilience of their sector.

Whether or not these ideas are correct is not the discussion we want to have here. Rather, we would like to draw attention to the fact that similar ideas about non-neutrality among local staff exist with respect to their international colleagues. While almost all panel members working for Northern, larger INGOs (14 out of 16) strongly agreed with the assumption that international staff and agencies are neutral actors; all 14 panel members with a Southern background were convinced this was not the case. They would typically make remarks such as the following:

Male field officer of NGO, aged 35:

"Neutrality does not exist in the aid industry. All those INGOs – they work with the government; their programs are controlled by the government. If the government does not want them to go to a certain area, they won't allow them to. And INGOs don't complain because otherwise they're being kicked out of the country. What is neutral about that?"

Female director of NGO, aged 47:

"This whole thing of neutrality and partiality that outsiders run... It seems that there is an automatic assumption that if you are an insider, that you are obliged, cannot be objective, cannot be neutral. I take offense to that, because it assumes that only Northern, white people can be neutral. And it's bull! I constantly see non-neutral, European white people! They come here and have already formed their opinions and allies and think one group is better than another. I've seen those biases! But because of their white skin, somehow they think they're above that."

Female office manager of NGO, aged 42:

"We're all human and we can all be corruptive. Our objectivity, the lens in which we view things, will never ever be 100% neutral or impartial. It's impossible. So that idea of so many INGOs that it can be, is a false assumption and it just creates comfort, and naivity and altruistic ideas, but it doesn't answer the real problems on the ground."

This clearly contrasts with excerpts taken from interviews with panel members working for INGOs:

Male office manager, aged 37:

"Our international staff was trained in the principles. So yes, no doubt, they are completely neutral in their work. The local staff – well, for them the principles are new. We try to train them, but it's nearly impossible for them. They have family here, or live in the communities we work with. So even if they understand how our organisation approaches the principles, it's different for them to actually adhere to them. Therefore, you need a mix in the organisation of local and international staff."

Female office manager of INGO, aged 41:

"Oh, yes, of course, we are 100 % neutral! We don't care about the conflict, we have nothing to do with it, other than helping whoever is wounded or needs help because of it.

Sure, people see me talking with conflict actors and they will tell you I am subjective, but I am not – I will help those actors just as much as I will help others in need, but I just need to negotiate with them to get access here."

Male coordinator of INGO, aged 37:

"We strictly work through the humanitarian principles. That is the problem with my local staff. They don't even know what the principles are. I come in the office and I hear them talking about 'those rebels', and I tell them: 'You cannot speak like that. You may think that, but you cannot say that in this office.' Not sure of that really resonates, though [laughs]."

Male coordinator of INGO, aged 41:

"I know people here think we are not neutral. Of course I know that. Our staff and compounds are being attacked! But they are mistaken. They don't see that we work though the principles – we always give aid in equal ways to those in need. Always. We are absolutely neutral."

So, while there is a lot of talk about localisation and partnerships, in the everyday practice in the field there still exists a habit of distinguishing or 'othering' between foreign and local staff as this is one way in which agency and individuals try to shield their legitimacy. In Chapter 3, we elaborate on the experience divides between Northern and Southern humanitarians.

2.2.2 For dealing with bureaucracy and financial mechanisms.
- Creative funding practices
- Little transparency towards donors

Trying to deal with bureaucratic challenges and the disadvantages of the financial structure of the aid system, practitioners often find creative ways to get funding and use it flexibly, and are being less transparent about their actual activities in donor reports. Examples of these creative strategies varied from person to person: we provide some examples below.

Some panel members, as we mentioned earlier in the chapter on challenges, write proposals to get funding and set up projects that go beyond what their organisation is specialised in. One example was provided by the aforementioned agency director in a LIC setting who is nowadays getting involved in cash programs while her agency does not have the experience or know-how because she knows that donors are currently spending money on those programs and her organisation is short of funds. Other panel members admit writing reports in a style that is so jargon-technical that their field staff hardly understand or use them, but they impress the donors. Yet others have started recently to try and get more private funding, rather than funding from donors, to avoid the difficulties with earmarked donor money. They have hired special staff for this task or even set up a whole department to actively seek funding from the private sector. Some practitioners always keep a little bit of money separate in their account labelled very broadly or vaguely, so that it can be used for a sudden crisis or sensitive issue even if donor funding rules do not allow for such flexibility. Finally, the majority of our panel members (25 out of 30) feels forced to spend more time on communication and PR towards their donors and host governments about their 'success', than on accountability

towards recipients, who at most get to fill in an evaluation form or are invited to complain during a short meeting with staff and the community.

2.2.3 For dealing with Ineffectiveness of programs
- Risk-averse programming
- Future proofing agency

Instead of moving away from individual projects and focussing on knowledge transfers and transparency/government processes (which would be the logical direction for the aid industry to go, according to most panellists), practitioners constantly make small amendments to projects and their own ways of working in the hope that this time, it will work. Some of the other coping strategies were mentioned earlier in this report: working only where it is feasible in order to 'guarantee success', and in places that are relatively easily accessible (with, of course, the result that the people most in need are often not reached at all), lowering expectations and strictly defining projects.

It can be argued that these strategies do not actually make the programs more sustainable or effective; instead, they seem to seek evidence for 'success' and may thus ensure the sustainability of the aid sector itself. Coping strategies that seemed common from the analysis include active lobbying with donors to get more money (which is done in informal meetings in bars and restaurants, or through regular, small friendship services from practitioners to donor-contacts), investing in donor reportage (making video clips for them, or fancy brochures, or actively engaging with the local media to make sure the agency is mentioned) and 'communication packaging' about success (investing in different messages to donors, beneficiaries, and local government – adapted to what might impress them most).

3
North–South differences

In this part of the report we discuss the strongly differing opinions and experiences that we gathered from panel members with a Northern or a Southern background. Although this 'gap' is by no means a new topic, a relevant contribution to the debate is the consistent difference in perceptions that we found between aid actors working for larger INGOs and local NGOs working in areas characterised by conflict and disaster. In our panel, 10 out of 30 people originated from the South and worked for a local aid organisation. Another three panellists also have a Southern background yet work for an INGO. All 13 strongly differed in opinion with panellists with a Northern background on the following themes: the extent to which the localisation agenda is being implemented, particularly with respect to equality in cooperation; trust in international policy processes; and the extent to which further integration between 'traditional' and 'new' aid actors (new donor governments and the private sector) should be an objective. Of course, the relatively low number of participants in this study makes it impossible to draw broad conclusions on any of these themes. Nevertheless, our finding tentatively suggests that research or policy decisions in which only 'Northern' voices are heard tell a limited part of the story.

3.1   Localisation agenda: Different north/south experiences

The move towards greater funding and ownership for local actors represents a major change in the humanitarian action situation. The move promises that it will result in a more effective humanitarian system but there is currently a lack of solid evidential basis. Within our panel, opinions were very diverse. Almost all panel members (28 out of 30) agreed that ideally, local organisations should own and manage aid in their own countries, as they have the potential for delivery of more appropriate, sustainable and effective humanitarian action than outsiders. Yet it is widely acknowledged and became clear in Chapter 2, that the implementation of the localisation agenda is currently limited.

3.1.1   Partnership versus subcontracting
According to the majority of panellists with a Northern background, there is more and more cooperation between local NGOs and INGOs and partnerships are becoming the norm. However, panellists with a Southern background say that while there exists a lot of cooperation between their agencies and Northern NGOs, these are hardly ever equal partnerships. From Lebanon to Afghanistan to Liberia to South Sudan, we heard of case studies where local NGOs are being subcontracted by INGOs to carry out projects for them, but don't get ownership of these projects. They find they have little to say in these projects and therefore there is hardly room for local innovation. Similarly, practitioners with a Southern background feel they have much difficulty in getting funding from large donors because, for example, it is hard for them to adhere to the language and jargon requirements.

3.1.2   High VS low trust in international policy processes
The state of the industry and the trust panel members have in the policy process was another area of difference in perception. Panellists with a Southern background were much more sceptical about the outcomes of past and future policy summits such as WHS (June 2017). According to them, the voices of Southern or smaller NGOs were generally ignored in these summits; the suggestions and ideas that they lobbied for were not being taken into account in meetings or communication outputs. They also insist that the real problems hampering the aid industry were hardly addressed in international meetings (such as the involvement of

donors in wars, or the dominant position of the UN), and that therefore, no relevant outcomes could be expected from such meeting. Typical remarks we heard were:

"Look, we've been at the WHS, we tried to get our message through, but nobody listened to us. It was all decided beforehand, only the big INGOs had the power to influence things. The next one will be the same. A lot of promises, a lot of talk, but in reality nothing is changing. We might not even go there anymore – what use is it? We better put our energy elsewhere."

"We have been lobbying and writing briefs, trying to get in touch with the larger INGOs, trying to organise events around the summit and we get a lot of lip service. But nothing happens. It is exhausting. I have no hope for international meetings in the future. If things are going to change, it will not come from that side. We got to do it ourselves."

"Ever since I started in this business I believed that things would change. That the big 8 would lose power and that we would get more influence. We have done everything we could for this to happen. And it did not. I have completely lost my faith in top meetings like WHS, where it is Northern, powerful aid actors setting the agenda, and we are there fighting in the margins – for nothing."

Our other panel-members agreed partly with this criticism on the outcomes of high-level meetings but had a much more positive outlook on what might be accomplished in the future through similar channels. Typical remarks by panellists with a Northern background were:

"We all know that there is a lot problematic in the structure of the aid industry. Working for the UN myself, I admit that this organisation has been dominating the sector while local NGOs had trouble to have their voices heard. But things are changing for the better – it is no longer like that at all. The aid sector is a big beast, and it takes a bit of time to change it. But things are certainly changing."

"Those meetings – they can't change everything that is wrong, but they do create improvements. We just have to be very patient, but we are heading in the right direction. Those cliché images about the North/South divide, they were true at one point, but they no longer are. Our Southern colleagues nowadays are completely equal in position to us. And they should be."

"It used to be the case that the UN and the other big INGOs had everything to say and smaller, local NGOs hardly got the chance to get funding or ownership over projects. That is absolutely no longer the case. Things have become much more equal now."

We fully acknowledge that with only 30 interviewees in this study, it is impossible to make any broader statement about the width or depth of the perceived gap between Northern and Southern agencies and staff. Yet it cannot be ignored, because the difference in opinion between those working for larger, Norther INGOs and those working for local NGOs was enormous – and consistent. As will become clear in section 3.3, the observed scepticism among our Southern panellists does not lead to apathy but is instead leading to more autonomous action.

3.2 Bilateral and private sector aid: problematic or the best way to go?

Without exception, panel members observe that the private sector is increasingly deeply involved in the humanitarian sector through economic diplomacy, or strategic partnerships with governments, such as the Chinese government investing in roads in Ethiopia, or the engagement of Gulf states in Somalia. Foreign governments run most of their aid projects parallel to humanitarians. It was a concern of the majority of panel members that if the humanitarian sector does not take a more proactive stand, they would be side-lined by these 'new' aid actors in the future. Practitioners with a Northern background considered the current poor integration of new donor governments, private sector and the 'traditional' aid industry problematic but inevitable – and they were sceptical about the possibilities of cooperation without having to compromise the humanitarian principles. Practitioners from the South on the other hand, while acknowledging the problem of differentiating motives for being involved in aid, held that it is crucial for the aid sector to actively seek cooperation and partnerships with new aid actors – even if that meant that the humanitarian principle of 'neutrality' would have to be renegotiated and reconsidered.

The fear of humanitarians becoming sidelined by private-public partnerships seems realistic. This became clear in the observation of one of the panellists, who attended a humanitarian meeting in South Asia were hardly any traditional aid actors were present – only commercial companies and government officials. From Afghanistan and Nepal, panel members made similar observations: currently private actors are all over the humanitarian field through government partnerships and it is not common for humanitarian agencies to be included in these partnerships.

Male field officer of INGO in HIC setting, aged 47:

> "We've been working in this area for months, and then suddenly you see a construction going on, some new building or road or water well or whatever. We know nothing about it, we weren't told. We ask our government contacts, and they are like: 'oh yeah, that is the government of country so and so helping us.' And I can understand they are happy with that arrangement, but it would be so much more efficient if we would have known this was coming up. Had they told us so in one of their meetings, we might have been able to give some advice based on the needs analyses we did, for example. Sometimes a foreign government builds something here for the national government and it stirs conflict among communities we work with because these governments don't take into account local tensions. And they don't care either. For them, it's just a business deal. The action is not so much taken for the people – it is taken because it is good for the governments. This is how I have seen it happening more and more often over the past years – it's a done deal before we even hear of it. Sometimes I wonder why we put all that energy into establishing trust and good relations with the government here. In the end, they have their own supporters now and don't really need us for the major things they want to get done in this country."

This parallel way of working was considered problematic but inevitable at the same time, as the motivations of foreign governments to be involved in disaster/conflict areas are questioned and it was recognised by all panel members that bilateral agreements are usually less bureaucratic and more lucrative (at least in a lobbying-sense) for governments, than are traditional types of 'aid provision' projects.

About two thirds of the panel members perceive so called 'new' donors such as China, India and the Gulf States as resourceful yet potentially threatening, in the sense that they do not adhere to humanitarian principles.

The others – all nine with a Southern background – had a radically opposing view: they believe the engagement of these actors is the best way to move forward, as they have the resources to improve the larger infrastructure and boost development in countries vulnerable to disaster and conflict. As became clear in Chapter 1, these steps are regarded by many humanitarians as the most needed to make aid more effective (or, ideally, less needed). The fact that new donors are not restricted by humanitarian principles was not regarded as a problem by these panellists, but rather as a strength. These actors can move fast and freely, independent of the bureaucracy and financing mechanisms of the traditional aid sector. When talking about new donors, these panel members insisted that it was unhelpful to talk about whether or not their engagement was 'humanitarian', as they pointed out that that concept itself is hardly recognised in Southern countries.

Female policy advisor for local NGO in LIC setting, aged 33:

> "We use that word in cluster meetings because it is part of the jargon of the INGO staff. But when I attend a government meeting, or a meeting with local NGOs – none of the attendees will ever speak about 'humanitarian' aid. None! They speak of development or of partnerships. That's it. So when the private sector gets involved or the Chinese government offers to help, then the whole concern that this is not 'humanitarian' is alien to people in my country. Completely!"

Male project manager for INGO in PC setting, aged 39:

> "If I write reports for the government here I never write the word 'humanitarian'. I only talk about that with my foreign colleagues. Here, people just talk about cooperation or support or partnerships. I don't think people really know what is meant with humanitarian. It's a Western word, really."

3.3 New coalitions

Perhaps as a consequence of the North/South gap, from different parts of the world we found evidence that new interest groups, lobby platforms and consortia of local NGOs are being developed to increase their influence, their chance for funding and without having to be dependent on INGOs or donors. One example is the NEAR network of 30 African organizations, 21 from Asia and 5 from the Middle East. Although its directors indicate that the network is now still a 'baby' and 'needs to learn how to walk', it has been successful in mediating a 100 million USD cash funding program in Somalia through forming a consortium of smaller, regional NGOs. It raised a lot of attention through its lobbying activities during the WHS. Similarly, the Lebanese Amel Association is extremely active in its region as well as in Geneva. It has had consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social

Council (ECOSOC) since 2010 and has been a member of the Collective of Lebanese NGOs, the Collective of Arab NGOs, the ICVA, the Global Coalition for Social Protection, and many other networks. High on their agenda is the issue of localisation – and they have had successes with partnerships between local NGOs and INGOs or foreign donors that, according to partners involved, may serve as best practice.

A final point to mention here is that several INGOs active in high-conflict settings are also trying to cooperate with other NGOs to help and convince them to join their work. This concerns international organisations with less resources for security. For example, MSF, overwhelmed by the needs in Somalia, has been lobbying through personal contacts in ICRC and other organisations to start projects there or even to take theirs over. For similar reasons, ICRC is currently investigating how they can help smaller organisations to get better access to funding – a funding pool was mentioned as one serious option; it is also giving training to other NGOs in types of projects relevant for HIC settings.

New questions and next steps

This report has juxtaposed the realities of humanitarian aid in conflict scenarios with the ideals expressed by high level meetings such as the Grand Bargain and with other guidelines and recommendations for effective aid practice. The challenges and persistent problems that were identified are highly relevant considering the increasingly frequent situations where conflict and disaster coincide, and the increasing gap between the needs of people around the world and the aid that donors and humanitarian agencies are currently providing.

The most important new questions that emerge from this analysis are:

- *How can humanitarian aid projects on disasters take into account different types of conflict considering the different challenges and best-practices that these entail?*

- *(How) can types of programs that work well in specific contexts, such as adaptive management in HIC settings, be used or scaled up in other contexts?*

- *How can humanitarians improve the effectiveness of aid within their rather limited room for manoeuvre and in the political structures in which they work?*

- *Considering the current legitimacy crisis of the aid industry, the politicisation of aid and the shrinking humanitarian space, and the fact that 'othering' is used as a strategy to legitimise the presence of foreign aid agencies in host communities, would it be useful to amend or relinquish humanitarian principles as a means of legitimacy? If this happens, what might be alternative ways of legitimation for aid agencies?*

- *Considering the negative impact of 'futureproofing' strategies that practitioners use to deal with daily challenges, what might be alternative ways to move forward? (Examples may or may not be sought in the section on 'sensible solutions', or in consortia such as described in Chapter 3)*

- *Should humanitarian actors take a more proactive approach towards 'new' actors in the aid field, most particularly private sector actors, and if so, how?*

- *If humanitarian principles would have to be renegotiated or reconsidered, how can this be done, according to practitioners?*

We realise, of course, that a lot of thinking about the humanitarian aid system and policies has already been done in recent years. Perhaps one problem is that many of the reports that have been written so far, provide meta-analyses that are not directly useful in the daily realities of the field. Therefore, in 2018, the third round of this expert panel will take place in the form of a workshop with selected participants about how humanitarian aid might work in different scenarios. Based on our findings presented in Chapter 3, about half of the participants would have to have a Southern background. This workshop will focus on a level between meta-analyses and single-country cases. By sketching different scenarios where aid, conflict and disaster come together, and discussing these with experienced practitioners, we might be able to offer more practical tools and experience-based insights. For example, if 'adaptive management' seems to be the current buzzword for HIC settings, thinking about scenarios

might be a way to investigate how this type of program could work outside the specific context in which it was developed by practitioners.

References

Anderson, M.B. (1999). *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace--or War.* Lynne Rienner Publishers

Bennett, C. (2016). *Time to let go: remaking humanitarian action for the modern era.* London: ODI Humanitarian Working Group.

DFID. (2010). *Working Effectively in Conflict-affected and Fragile Situations.*

DFID. (2012). *Results in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States and Situations.*

Donini A., and D. Maxwell, (2014). From Face-to-Face to Face-to-Screen: Implications of Remote Management for the Effectiveness and Accountability of Humanitarian Action in Insecure Environments. In: *International Review of the Red Cross* 95: 383-413.

Healy S. and S. Tiller. (2014). *Where Is Everyone? Responding to Emergencies in the Most Difficult Places.* Médecins Sans Frontières, London

Hilhorst, D. (2014). *When disasters meet conflict.* NWO Research Proposal.

Hilhorst, D., and E. Pereboom (2015). *Internationale noodhulp doorgelicht Nederlandse humanitaire hulp: nu en in de toekomst.* Online Report. Accessible via www.oneworld.nl/sites/oneworld.nl/files/internationale_noodhulp_doorgelicht.pdf

ICVA (2017). *The grand bargain explained.* An ICVA briefing paper

IFRC, 2013). World Disasters Report. Accessible via www.ifrc.org/en/publications-and-reports/world-disasters-report/world-disasters-report-2013.

International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO) (2017). Database online: www.ngosafety.org

Kamradt-Scott, A. (2016). Navigating the role of the private sector in health emergencies. In: *Medicine, Conflict and Survival* 32 (3): 171-174.

OCHA. (2013). *Humanitarianism in the network age.*

Okili, C. and S. Pawlowski, 2004). The Delphi method as a research tool: an example, design considerations and applications. In: *Information and Management* 42 (1): 15-29.

Potvin, M.F. (2016). Humanitarian hybrids: new technologies and humanitarian resilience. In: Sanderson, D., J.S. Kayden, and J.Leis, (eds.) *Urban Disaster Resilience. New Dimensions from International Practice in the Built Environment*: 182-196. New York and London: Routledge.

Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) (2016). *Eyes and ears on the ground: monitoring aid in insecure environments.*

Sendai Framework of Action (2016). UNISDR.

Slim, H. (2015). *Humanitarian Ethics: a Guide to the Morality of Aid in War and Disaster.* London, C Horst and Co Publishers.

Turiff and H.A. Linstone (2002). *The Delphi Method Techniques and Applications.* Portland State University, New Jersey Institute of Technology

Vale, L., T. Campanella (eds.) (2005). *The Resilient City: How Modern Cities Recover from Disaster.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

World Humanitarian Data and Trends (2016). Final report. OCHA.