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## COURTING CATASTROPHE? HUMANITARIAN POLICY AND PRACTICE IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

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# Climate Change Adaptation Through Humanitarian Aid? Promises, Perils and Potentials of the ‘New Humanitarianism’

Andrei Marin<sup>1</sup> and Lars Otto Naess<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract** A major reform of the humanitarian sector is currently under way, focusing increasingly on the prevention of crises rather than on providing relief once crises have occurred. This article examines whether and how this new humanitarian approach can also improve people’s ability to adapt to climate change. We identify three approaches central to this ‘new humanitarianism’, namely resilience, disaster risk reduction and early warning systems, and discuss them in relation to broad principles for adaptation to climate change. We find that, despite encouraging potential and a lot of common ground, key barriers and hindrances still exist, such as inertia of organisational cultures and existing financial models. We suggest that realising this potential will require acknowledging and addressing the multitude of local social, historical and political inequities that drive both humanitarian crises and vulnerability to climate change.

**Keywords:** ‘new humanitarianism’, resilience, disaster risk reduction, early warning systems, inequality, climate change, climate change adaptation.

## 1 Introduction

Over the past decade, international humanitarian aid has undergone major structural reform, aimed at responding more effectively to changing, and steadily more complex, humanitarian crises (Bennett, Foley and Pantuliano 2016; UNOCHA 2011). Climate change represents one of the key factors that has challenged traditional humanitarian aid, in that it is changing the nature and severity of humanitarian emergencies. There is increasing recognition among humanitarian actors of the importance of adaptation to climate change, and in particular resilience. Resilience features prominently across all major post-2015 frameworks, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (Sendai Framework), the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the

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World Humanitarian Summit framework (WHS) (Peters *et al.* 2016). In response, humanitarian actors – government, intergovernmental and non-governmental – are increasingly integrating support to adaptation and resilience in their policies and programmes (e.g. UNOCHA 2011).

The background for this change is an increasing acknowledgement that traditional, response-driven actions are no longer appropriate; on the contrary, they may reinforce or increase vulnerabilities to climate-related hazards (Anderson and Woodrow 1998; Wisner 2001). Examples may be rebuilding houses in areas exposed to increasing climate-related risks, or providing seeds that are inappropriate to future climate change. However, we know less so far about whether and how these approaches are contributing to long-term adaptation goals. This article examines some common approaches to adaptation among humanitarian actors and their implications for adaptation.

Our inquiry comes at a time when the long-standing separation between the traditional province of humanitarian work (post-disaster response), and the normal purview of development interventions (poverty reduction, in the context of vulnerability and risk) is gradually being removed. Our guiding research question is whether and how this new humanitarian approach may contribute to climate change adaptation, and what implications this may have for research as well as policy.

The article investigates this question by examining whether current interventions (by humanitarian agencies and governments) match criteria usually identified as essential in facilitating climate change adaptation. We look at adaptation as ultimately being about addressing the social, economic and political root causes of vulnerability to climate variability and change. To do this, we use written (published and 'grey') sources from humanitarian agencies on approaches, programmes and practices, and compare these with recent academic literature on climate change adaptation.

## **2 The 'new humanitarianism': its roots and present form**

Weather-related events are increasingly seen by humanitarian actors as occurring against a background of other debilitating circumstances (GHAR 2013). An estimated two thirds of current disasters are related to climate hazards (*ibid.*). Climate-related hazards were, for example, responsible for 98 per cent of all displacements caused by disasters in 2012, and 93 per cent in 2011 (*ibid.*). Monsoon floods in India and rainy season floods in Nigeria displaced 7 million people in 2012.

The recognition of deeper social, political and economic factors acting as drivers of vulnerability and causing disasters has a long history (O'Keefe, Wisner and Westgate 1976; Hewitt 1983; Blaikie *et al.* 1994), yet for the humanitarian sector this acknowledgement is relatively recent. In the late 1980s, the term 'complex emergencies' was coined in humanitarian and development circles in order to signal the appearance of a new kind of complex humanitarian crisis, characterised by unprecedented levels of

poverty, political insecurity, internal conflict, state disintegration and internal population displacement (Duffield 1994). It became increasingly obvious at the time that in order to address such complex issues, a normative and theoretical reform was necessary, one that would account for the political decisions connected to humanitarian interventions (or lack thereof).

The changes in the humanitarian agenda and mandate should also be seen in the context of an increasing number of humanitarian crises that require radically increased and extended interventions. This situation has had an impact on humanitarian policies and strategies over recent decades (Borton 1993; Duffield 1994; Macrae 2002; Nan 2010; Taylor *et al.* 2012; Bennett *et al.* 2016). Humanitarian actors have come to look at themselves in a different context, as perhaps more important actors than previously, with the ability to prevent such crises if involved over a longer period of time in a given location.

The present impetus to abandon linear, non-systemic approaches to humanitarian emergencies (Ramalingam 2014) takes the insights of the 1990s further and builds on some key elements increasingly acknowledged in humanitarian practice, namely that (1) more preventive action is needed, moving from reaction to prevention and preparedness; (2) there is a need for improved collaboration with development aid, to help address underlying vulnerabilities and prevent crises from escalating into acute situations of need; and (3) multi-year humanitarian funding cycles as well as new programming ideas, such as cash transfers at scale in times of crisis, are necessary (GHAR 2013).

This type of thinking has already been implemented in some concrete ways. For example, the so-called ‘Nairobi Strategy’ identified the 2011 crisis in the Horn of Africa as having been ‘partly determined by a prolonged under-investment in drought-prone areas’ and the solution to similar crises to be the building of resilience to economic and climatic shocks’ by combining relief, recovery, reconstruction, innovation, and long-term sustainable development (TNS 2011: 3).

A series of key humanitarian actors have already followed the general strategy laid out in Nairobi within their own specific efforts. For example, OXFAM supports longer-term development programmes and responses to forecasts (GHAR 2013), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) focuses on early warning and resilience-building projects (including cash transfer programming), while the EU has launched its ‘Supporting the Horn of Africa’s Resilience (SHARE)’<sup>3</sup> in response to the delayed response to the 2011 crisis, and in the UK, the Humanitarian Emergency Response Review (HERR) was a key policy document (HERR 2011).

These concrete efforts are a direct effect of the Humanitarian Reform Process begun in 2005 by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). The reform aimed to improve the response capacity, accountability, predictability and partnership of

the humanitarian system. It is against this background (and a few major 'failures' of the humanitarian system in fresh memory: the 2010 Haiti earthquake, and the Pakistan floods the same year, as well as the Horn of Africa drought in 2011) that the so-called 'Transformative Agenda' (TA) was developed in December 2011 and the 'Transformative Agenda Protocols' in December 2012. The TA was developed by the IASC as a set of concrete actions aimed at changing the way in which the humanitarian community responds to emergencies, by improving the strategic planning, timeliness and effectiveness of the collective response, more effective coordination and improved accountability to affected people.

This new thinking acknowledged that future large-scale emergencies will also be connected to climate change. At the same time, it underlined that the impacts of these emergencies (and indeed their emergence) are to a large extent also affected by violent conflicts, communicable diseases and pandemics (e.g. HIV/AIDS), and a general increase in vulnerability due to poverty, hunger, unemployment, displacement and migration (IASC 2011).

In Section 3, we discuss how the general principles of the integrative, preventive humanitarianism is practised and envisioned in relation to broad principles for adaptation to climate change. We illustrate this with a range of humanitarian conceptualisations of humanitarian work that hold potential synergies with climate change adaptation.

### **3 Approaches used by humanitarian actors relevant to climate change adaptation**

#### **3.1 The resilience approach**

Resilience is an increasingly popular term among humanitarian actors, central to the reform agenda and present humanitarian thinking. Resilience originates from ecological systems work (Holling 1973), but its use has over recent decades been extended to social-ecological systems, defined as 'the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganize while undergoing change so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedbacks' (Walker *et al.* 2004: 5). Over the past 10–15 years, resilience has become increasingly dominant as the policy goal for work on adaptation to climate change, albeit with a wide variety of definitions (Brown 2015; Bahadur, Ibrahim and Tanner 2010). Similarly, resilience has a wide range of definitions and understandings across the humanitarian landscape. One definition, used by UNOCHA, refers to resilience as the ability of communities and households to endure stresses and shocks. Resilience, in this understanding, is an end state that implies that vulnerable communities and households have (1) the capacity to maintain basic functions and structures during stresses and shocks; (2) access to a range of skills and resources that allow them to adapt to changing circumstances; and (3) the ability to anticipate, prevent, prepare for and respond to stresses and shocks without compromising their long-term prospects (UNOCHA 2011).

Nevertheless, programmatic activities that aim to build resilience of vulnerable communities and households are not new. They may include activities that fall into one or several of the categories of: disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness, livelihood support, or social protection, including the provision of basic services (*ibid.*).

Despite continued critical theoretical evaluations of the term and its political implications for humanitarian actions (e.g. Levine 2014), resilience is already being applied practically in humanitarian work. The government of Australia started an ambitious reform of their humanitarian efforts in 2009. This is illustrated for example in their DRR policy for Australian aid programmes (GHAR 2013). The stated goal of the policy is to reduce vulnerability and enhance resilience of countries and communities to disasters, and Australia's Pacific Risk Resilience Programme aims to reduce the Pacific Islands' climate change-related risk and improve their resilience.

The EU has embraced a similar approach in its resilience policy (EC 2012) and its follow-up Action Plan for 2013–20 (EC 2013), identifying resilience as a necessary connection between development and humanitarian assistance, and an analytical linchpin to both emergency and development support. Japan is also important in agenda-setting for resilience. Its earlier leading role on DRR within the work of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is now being focused on connecting DRR to resilience. This is also reflected in Japan hosting the Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015,<sup>4</sup> which aimed to establish resilience as a key element of the post-Millennium Development Goals framework. The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) also has resilience as a central guiding principle enabling the integration of humanitarian aid and development cooperation into medium-term programming (up to four years) (Levine and Mosel 2014). Finally, Britain's Department for International Development (DFID) also uses resilience thinking in testing different approaches for longer-term (also up to four years) humanitarian programming in protracted crises (for example in Ethiopia, Yemen, Democratic Republic of the Congo or Sudan) (DFID 2015).

There are also more specific efforts of long-term engagement in humanitarian assistance thinking, with or without clear connections to resilience. For example, the UN launched in 2012, for the first time, a three-year Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) for Somalia, aimed at allowing humanitarian agencies to invest more in relatively longer-term planning and preventive measures. The Somalia CAP has a planning horizon of three years (2013–15), allowing for more predictable financing against chronic crises and resilience building. Usually, such CAPs are annual, and although they may also reflect the new rhetoric and focus on resilience (e.g. FAO 2013), they do not have the same possibility to plan for 'long-term' resilience building or vulnerability reduction. Nevertheless, we should also observe that a three-year programme may be too short to significantly improve the

**Table 1 Important differences and signs of convergence of disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation**

Differences		Signs of convergence
DRR	Adaptation	
All hazard types	Climate and weather-related hazards	DRR integrating climate change impacts on hazard frequency and magnitude and on vulnerability and planning interventions
Practice of DRR strongly influenced by post-disaster humanitarian assistance	Origin in natural science/international climate policy process	Mainstreaming into development sectors and increasing number of specialists working on both adaptation and DRR
Present and near future: existing risks based on assessment of local experience and history	Short-, medium- and long-term future – uncertainty and new risks from the impacts of climate change	DRR increasingly forward-looking and CCA increasingly using existing climate variability as the entry point
Traditional and local knowledge is the basis for community-based DRR and resilience building	Traditional and local knowledge insufficient? Climate change introduces new/changed risks	Growing number of examples where local knowledge and meteorological/ climatological knowledge being considered side-by-side to inform DRR interventions
Risk a function of hazard, vulnerability, exposure and capacity	Vulnerability often used interchangeably with physical exposure	IPCC SREX* special report on managing the risks of extreme events and disasters for advancing adaptation (2012)
Full range of established and developing tools	Range of tools under development	Significant progress made in integrating learning from DRR into adaptation tool development
Incremental development, moderate political interest	New, emerging agenda, high political interest	Disasters more often seen as linked to climate change, and actors recognising the need to consider both simultaneously
Funding streams often <i>ad hoc</i> , unpredictable and insufficient	Funding streams increasing, though problems of delivery	DRR community demonstrating signs of being increasingly savvy in engaging in climate change adaptation funding mechanisms

Note SREX stands for Special Report on Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation.

Source Mitchell, van Aalst and Silva Villanueva (2010).

long-term resilience of vulnerable groups, even if it can significantly affect the pathways that are chosen and the possibility for meaningful adaptation. Such longer-term CAPs have surely added some leeway to humanitarian programmes in relation to major events, but since the end of 2013 have also been discontinued and replaced instead with appeals through the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC), which is an explicit part of the Transformative Agenda. The HPC approach is still new, so it is not clear to what extent it can actually facilitate longer-term funding for protracted crises. There is at least some evidence that the ‘needs assessment’ element of the HPC is not yet being implemented by some major humanitarian organisations (Olin and von Schreeb 2014).



Still, even if the needs assessment is going to be implemented at large scale, there is little encouragement to believe that funding horizons for protracted crises can easily extend beyond a few years (perhaps three, as in the case of CAPs).

### 3.2 Disaster risk reduction

Disaster risk reduction (DRR) is another important and long-standing approach in humanitarian interventions. Disasters are seen herein as the outcome of continuously present conditions of risk, while disaster risk comprises different types of potential losses, of lives, health status, livelihoods, assets and services (UNISDR 2009). Disaster risk *reduction* is seen as reducing disaster risks through managing the causal factors of disasters, for example by reduced exposure to hazards, lessened vulnerability of people and property, and improved preparedness for adverse events (*ibid.*).

Some examples of current humanitarian approaches are illustrative of the approach. The governments of Netherlands and Sweden specifically mention DRR as a priority in their humanitarian policies. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), for instance, considers reducing risk as a key component of humanitarian work to be achieved by linking relief, recovery and development interventions. Resilience for SIDA (Örnéus and Magnusson 2012) is to be based on this linking at both field and policy level. The connection between DRR and the resilience approaches are also illustrated in DFID's approach (DFID 2005). Their scaling up of aid in Pakistan, for example, included a US\$50 million project called 'Resilience Support to Pakistan', aimed at supporting a better response to natural disasters by building resilience (*ibid.*).

Nevertheless, integration may be difficult due to significant differences between DRR and climate change adaptation. Some of the identified difficulties include their focus on different spatial and temporal scales, their knowledge bases and their norm systems (Birkmann and von Teichman 2010). Other challenges are incentives, institutional and funding structures that operate differently in humanitarian aid and development planning (*ibid.*). Further challenges include wrong assumptions about the capacity of development programmes to reduce risk, as well as inadequate exposure to, and information about, disasters among development workers (DFID 2005; Mitchell *et al.* 2010). Table 1 summarises some important differences and convergences between the two approaches.

Some have argued that post-disaster humanitarian assistance can in fact *increase* vulnerability in the long term (Anderson and Woodrow 1998; Wisner 2001). This can happen if there are conflicts of interest between the will to prevent and reduce risk on the one hand, and the political and economic incentives of national governments to pursue development strategies that expose some categories of people to risks on the other. We know from studies of climate change adaptation that this is a challenging overlap, as climate change adaptation is often

mainstreamed *into* the current model of development, rather than challenging intrinsic forms of structural inequity and vulnerability (Eriksen and Marin 2014).

Still, there are encouraging developments in the humanitarian sector. The potential for addressing both humanitarian crises and climate change adaptation, through the DRR approach, is clearly recognised by some major humanitarian actors (e.g. IFRC 2014), who propose a mainstreaming of these concerns into policies and planning of their National Societies. One remaining challenge may be to match these concerns with national development strategies and priorities.

### 3.3 Early warning systems

Early warning systems are another commonly used approach among humanitarian actors, and an integral part of the Transformative Agenda. They comprise a range of forecasting initiatives used to identify the likelihood of specific threatening events or conditions to occur in specific locations in the near future. Much of the early warning focus has traditionally been placed on forecasting climate-related and other 'natural' disasters, with more recent attention being given to humanitarian crises such as ethnic conflicts, political violence or forced migration. Despite obvious differences between 'natural' and 'social' phenomena to be forecast, there is a significant overlap between the approaches used to forecast both types of phenomena (Schmeidl and Jenkins 1998). The early warning systems first came to prominence during the 1980s, with increased efforts from the late 1990s in the wake of more variable and extreme weather, notably related to El Niño events. Among the early warning initiatives relevant to the Transformative Agenda are the United Nations IASC's Humanitarian Early Warning Service (HEWS), the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations' (FAO) Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS), the Forum on Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER), and the Famine Early Warning System (FEWS).

All these initiatives bring together academics and policy analysts involved in humanitarian relief to develop early warning signals and information. These systems and initiatives are reflected in the work of most major humanitarian actors, at least in some of their programmes and specific units. Briefly, the approach is that 'forewarned is forearmed', meaning that UN agencies have invested in early warning systems that can give them the information they need, delivered in the best possible way.

Preparedness buys the humanitarian community valuable time, allowing them to respond swiftly and effectively to save lives, crops, property, important infrastructure (e.g. in education and health care), thus stopping a bad situation from becoming worse (Standley 2011).

In practice, the strategy can be to have supplies stocked in key points of a region, accessible to all partners, as the quickest way to get emergency relief to a disaster zone. For instance, the UN has established a Humanitarian Response Depot for Latin America and the Caribbean in

Panama City, as well as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and the Spanish Cooperation also has a depot in the city. Among others, this strategy has enabled more rapid delivery of relief supplies such as food, medical help and infant formula immediately after the earthquake that hit Haiti in January 2010 (*ibid.*).

In other cases, this type of preparedness takes the form of bilateral or multilateral government agreements for contingency/emergency plans. UNOCHA collaborated with the Southern African Development Community (SADC), establishing a regional inter-agency response plan which was used when several SADC members (Mozambique, Malawi, Zimbabwe and Zambia) were hit by severe floods in 2008 (Standley 2011). Others have shown that early warning systems for disease outbreaks or impacts of heatwaves can be developed based on weather indicators such as seas' surface temperatures and rainfall (Patz *et al.* 2005).

It is clear, however, that while they play an important role in averting humanitarian crises, early warning systems are far from sufficient. Evidence from the 2001 famine in the Horn of Africa is rather telling with respect to the functioning of early warning systems. While these systems seemed to have provided actionable high-quality information many months in advance, there was a lack of incentives to act upon them due to a combination of factors that included decision-makers' discomfort with the probabilistic nature of the warning, the Al Shabaab presence in the area, and US anti-terrorist legislation (Hillbruner and Moloney 2012). Importantly, there were also significant failures in the adequacy of information provided by some early warning systems: in some cases, because they did not provide sufficiently analysed or interpreted data (only 'raw' data); in other cases, because they were not timely enough or not sufficiently integrated across the region (Ververs 2012).

The above examples illustrate two shortcomings of the potential of early warning systems to support adaptation to climate change. On the one hand, a dichotomy seems to persist between forecasting for 'natural' disasters relief and forecasting humanitarian crises (Schmeidl and Jenkins 1998; de Leeuw, Vis and Jonkman 2012). There is still an assumption that 'natural' disasters are easier and more straightforward to both predict and respond to effectively. If climate change adaptation is treated as reacting to natural, objective events, it is likely to encourage a type of early warning that treats hazards as natural phenomena that are equally distributed among geographical units of different sizes, or among different categories of local inhabitants. We know today that this is not the case, and that neither disasters nor adaptation are in any way 'natural', benign or equally distributed.

#### **4 Filling two needs with one deed? Humanitarian approaches and climate change adaptation**

Complex humanitarian crises have now for three decades exposed the fact that traditional relief packages and staff-intensive single interventions are inadequate in themselves. This has led to calls for new

approaches that instead of re-supplying disaster-struck areas to 'get back to normal', aim at long-term support, while at the same time accepting some state of lasting turbulence and acknowledging the culture, history and fast-moving politics inherent in the crises (Slim 1995). The author called this approach 'development relief' (*ibid.*: 121).

The conceptual affiliation between such new humanitarianism and recent approaches to both development and adaptation is also underscored by the centrality of 'resilience' across both areas. Moreover, 'resilience' thinking has also become an important element of thinking around climate change adaptation. Resilience is often specifically presented as a potential bridging concept between climate change adaptation and sustainable development (IPCC 2012; Denton *et al.* 2014; USAID 2014). With the emergence of the so-called third generation of adaptation studies, which consider climate change adaptation as robust decision-making under uncertainty (WRI 2011), climate change adaptation and development have started to become more integrated particularly through the idea of resilience.<sup>5</sup> Resilience can be understood narrowly as the ability of a system to maintain its structures and functions in the face of shocks and stressors, or more broadly, as is increasingly the case also in humanitarian policy and practice, in terms of the ability of people, communities and systems to transform in the face of shocks and stressors (Béné *et al.* 2012; Peters *et al.* 2016). While resilience is a contested concept, one of its strengths is arguably as a 'boundary object' in its ability to communicate across the DRR and adaptation communities, with numerous efforts towards a better integration between the two (Baggio, Brown and Hellebrandt 2015; Harris and Bahadur 2011; Schipper and Pelling 2006).

The increasing popularity of resilience may also be seen as a recognition of the necessity of integrating the short- and long-term perspectives, the systemic and the local. Underpinning the everyday use of resilience are useful theoretical reflections that point to resilience as relying on both fast and slow variables and adaptive cycles (e.g. Walker *et al.* 2012; Holling and Gunderson 2002). This is also reminiscent of what Ramalingam identified as a pressing need for humanitarianism to move away from 'short-term, linear, and "non-systemic" thinking' (2014: 20).

Others have also pointed to the need for integrating the current three most important global processes for development-related topics: (1) the redesigning of the framework for disaster risk reduction; (2) the drafting of the SDGs; and (3) the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) attempt to draft a legally binding treaty for dealing with climate change (Kelman 2015). It is perhaps this convergence of interests and the timeliness of such efforts to interrogate and reform current development pathways that hold the greatest promise and potential for re-orienting humanitarian aid at this particular socio-historical juncture. Yet, for this to happen, there are some substantial discussions that are needed, but which do not as yet figure prominently, at least publicly, on the humanitarian agenda.

Some of these discussions will have to interrogate fundamental principles that have always guided humanitarian work. Other discussions will have to address structural reforms. From the first category, one obvious element is the principle of impartiality and the focus on ‘communities’. This is potentially problematic in that it obscures varied and complex inequities between a range of actors who are differently exposed to proximate causes of disasters (droughts, floods), as well as variously constrained by the structural, root causes of vulnerability.

Although impartiality as a principle is moderated with assessments of needs, there are potential pitfalls there too. The main technical approach to deliver aid based on differentiated needs, is the Needs Assessment Framework and Matrix (NAFM). One limitation of the NAFM is that needs may be assessed in relation to a particular ‘disaster’, and it may therefore be difficult to use the NAFM preventively. This is sometimes recognised by aid agencies and funders, which acknowledge that the NAFM has a sectoral view, based on indicators that may not provide an accurate enough picture of the dynamics in the communities: ‘[P]ockets of need are identified which support a specific project proposal, but the overall picture of relative need across a crisis is very patchy’ (Willitts-King 2006: 27). Other technical tools for assessing needs are Rapid Assessment Format, and Capacities and Vulnerabilities Assessments (CVAs). While the former is rather reactive and geared towards relief, CVAs have the potential to address structural vulnerabilities by investing in supporting longer-term development programmes, as suggested in more recent approaches (e.g. UNOCHA 2007: ix). Still, in order to achieve this, an elaborate assessment of the social context is required, and therefore funding and programming models have to allow for these kind of analyses that perhaps entail closer collaboration with social scientists.

If humanitarian interventions (or indeed, adaptation interventions) focus on building the resilience of a ‘system’, there is a risk that interventions may overlook the socially differentiated nature of vulnerability and reinforce entrenched inequities and other root causes of vulnerability, even though the resilience of the overall system may be increased. After all, resilience does not tell us much about any normative principles underlying the interventions. Addressing this conundrum may also run counter to the humanitarian principle of operational independence, i.e. that humanitarian actions must be autonomous from the political, economic or military objectives of other actors. We propose that long-term humanitarian engagement is more likely to succeed by engaging with larger-scale development strategies and structures, including challenging structural constraints such as government development policies and programmes.

The second category of discussions that are needed are those concerned with the operation of funding and programming. Part of this discussion is the time-horizon that is needed for engaging meaningfully with resilience building, livelihood security, or climate change adaptation

goals of humanitarian interventions. The way we perceive the situation today is that, despite intentions to be involved in the long term, many humanitarian actors are still constrained by the funding mechanisms of project-based interventions that run for a few years only.

## 5 Conclusion

This article has examined whether and how recent changes in humanitarian approaches, from responsive to increasingly preventive modes and ways of working, can contribute to climate change adaptation.

Our review suggests that the 'new humanitarianism' emerging over recent decades holds important potential for contributing to climate change adaptation due to a close conceptual match between humanitarian principles that focus on vulnerable groups, and adaptation approaches that address underlying vulnerabilities. At the same time, realisation of this potential is limited by the operation of humanitarian organisations within their current negotiated spaces at national and international levels, and by power struggles over influence and resources.

We argue that humanitarian approaches emerging from the UN-led Transformative Agenda make it necessary to address local social, historical and political contexts in new and different ways from previous one-time efforts aimed at 'restoring order'. Such involvements engender power negotiations and struggles over the meaning of what is desirable both in terms of development pathways and of climate change adaptation. These meanings will inescapably have different arrays of supporters and varying degrees of implementation. The boundaries between such categories as vulnerable, resilient or adapted should therefore be understood as permeable, shifting and open to contestation. Such processes of contestation are also influenced by national and international dynamics. This, we propose, begets difficulties for humanitarian interventions that often ignore the root causes of humanitarian crises, or of vulnerability to climate change.

In addition, we propose that for humanitarian interventions to play a role in climate change adaptation, they need to reflect critically on their influence on domestic development pathways. Humanitarianism cannot be assumed as removed from everyday political struggles and insulated from them due to its principles of non-partisanship and operational independence.

The humanitarian reform of the last decade contains the theoretical possibilities, practical leverage power, and knowledge for progressive change located at the interface between humanitarian aid, development aid and climate change adaptation. The current challenge is to include in this reform some difficult discussions regarding the political nature of humanitarianism.

## Notes

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- 2 IDS (l.naess@ids.ac.uk).
- 3 A €270 million joint humanitarian-development programme aimed at building resilience through recovery from drought and building resilience against acute and lasting emergencies.
- 4 [www.wcdrr.org](http://www.wcdrr.org).
- 5 First generation adaptation studies focused on discrete adaptation to specific climatic change, while second generation studies focused on ‘vulnerability first’.

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