



Indramaya Shrestha searches for belongings in the ruins of her home, Nepal, April 2015. Photo: Aubrey Wade/Oxfam.

FOR HUMAN DIGNITY

The World Humanitarian Summit and the challenge to deliver

Tens of millions of people receive vital humanitarian aid every year, but millions more suffer without adequate help and protection, and their number is relentlessly rising.

Far too often this is because their own governments cannot, or wilfully will not ensure their citizens' access to aid and protection.

But international aid has not kept pace with the rising tide of climate-related disasters and seemingly intractable conflicts. And the promise to help affected people reduce their vulnerability to future disasters, and to lead their own humanitarian response, has not yet been kept.

Part of the solution is in the hands of humanitarians. Twenty-five years of reforms have still not built truly accountable humanitarian agencies – UN, NGO or government – that are both swift to respond to new crises and that invest enough in building more resilient, sustainable futures.

But most of the solution is not in humanitarians' hands. They do not cause the conflicts, climate change and inequality that drive crises. Until the world's governments – which will gather for the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016 – address the injustice behind humanitarian crises, the demand for aid will keep on rising, and tens of millions more men, women and children will keep on struggling to survive.

One Summit cannot change everything. But the key tests of its integrity and success are that it:

- **Demands that states are held to account for their international obligations on assistance and protection**
- **Sets out genuinely new ways to support local humanitarian action, reverse the growing gap between the amount of aid needed and given, and reduce the risk of future disasters**

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For further information on the issues raised in this paper please e-mail advocacy@oxfaminternational.org

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FOREWORD



Our world is becoming a more dangerous place. Crises are intensifying. For many years the humanitarian community has responded to one crisis after another, sometimes successfully, sometimes only partially so. But too often there have been failures. These failures rest on the injustices and inequalities that help to drive these crises in the first place. And always the people who are most poor and vulnerable are left suffering the consequences.

We have the wherewithal to build a better global humanitarian system. And we have the duty to tackle the world's failure to uphold the rights to assistance and protection that international law already sets out.

Civil society fought very hard for these rights to be enshrined in today's humanitarian system. These have given us a good foundation now to put 'solidarity with people' at the heart of an improved system.

A successful humanitarian response begins before a crisis hits. We need to tackle the structural causes of crisis, not simply to mop up its tragic human consequences afterward. We must act together to change the harmful policies and practices that spark a crisis and deepen people's vulnerability to it in the first place. If that makes Oxfam's work 'political' then it is proudly so – we have stayed true to our vision since 1942.

The focus of tomorrow's renewed humanitarian response system must shift fundamentally toward Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. This is where political and economic power is moving, and where people's opportunities and needs are greatest.

Far too often, whether rotten or wrecked, states fail and fall into conflict. And today – in some ways both rotten and wrecked – the world faces the existential challenge of climate change caused by human actions. In the face of these huge challenges, our leaders often face real and invented pressures *not* to do their humanitarian duty.

Oxfam will continue to work in solidarity with allies, partners and local communities to bolster our leaders to take their humanitarian responsibilities seriously and resist the pressures of inertia. This paper outlines four key tests for the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. At the heart of each one exists 'people' and making good their agency, knowledge, resilience and rights.

Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director of Oxfam International

SUMMARY



'We don't want food. We want to be protected from what is happening.'

Resident of Homs, Syria¹

A woman and her child take shelter as a jet bombs the streets around her home in, Aleppo, Syria in 2012. Photo: Sam Tarling/Oxfam.

Tens of millions of people receive vital humanitarian aid every year. Oxfam alone helped more than 8 million people in 2014, including 3.6 million with better access to clean water;² and in June 2015 the UN was appealing for funds to reach 78.9 million people across 37 countries.³ However, millions suffer without adequate help or protection, and the number of people exposed to crises seems to relentlessly increase.

This is not primarily because the so-called 'humanitarian system' is failing, but because of the injustice at the heart of humanitarian crises:

- The poorest and least powerful are always the most vulnerable;
- Those who cause conflicts and climate change are the last to pay for their consequences;
- Too many states – and other armed groups – ride roughshod over their citizens' rights to assistance and protection; and
- Too many other governments, including those sitting on the UN Security Council, squabble over political rivalries instead of uniting to uphold the international law that already exists.

What is wrong is not that humanitarian action has stood still. It has not. The World Humanitarian Summit's host, Turkey, exemplifies the contribution of nations that have been traditionally excluded from the Western 'club' of humanitarian leaders. If the \$1.6bn it spent on hosting Syrian refugees in 2013 is included, Turkey gives more humanitarian aid than any other country except the US and UK.⁴

Despite the UN's 'Transformative Agenda', international humanitarian aid has not been transformed. The series of reforms that have resulted from the painful lessons of past crises since the Cold War must be successfully completed. The promise of swifter, more appropriate and more accountable aid must be kept – not only for disaster response, but also to invest more humanitarian and development aid in reducing the risk of future disasters, and in the long-term recovery from the world's tragically long list of protracted crises.

This requires a real transformation in both humanitarian and development aid. The world's donors must get more funds onto the ground, where aid actually happens, and minimize the money lost in the UN and international NGOs that serve as the 'middle men' of the international humanitarian world. Local governments, national and local NGOs and civil society must be empowered to lead wherever they can.

This would *not* render UN agencies and international NGOs obsolete – far from it. The rising tide of disasters makes them more vital than ever before. But there must be a clearer distinction of how they add value; for example, by rapidly scaling up in massive disasters; by strengthening the capacity of local organizations and their networks; and by bearing witness to the horrors of conflicts that the world too often ignores.

However, the fundamental way to reduce the terrible toll of suffering in humanitarian crises is not any change to international aid. It is to uphold the international humanitarian and refugee law to which governments have already agreed. It is to act on humanitarian principles, such as impartiality, every day. It is to tackle the inequalities and injustices that drive humanitarian crises.

'The climate has changed. It's raining much more. We have landslides. The corn plants dry up. We can't harvest them.'

Elena Diaz, Olupa, Guatemala⁵



Syrian refugees being rescued by an Italian ship in the Mediterranean.
Photo: UNHCR/A. D'Amato

'We ran away from death. And then we saw death again [in the Mediterranean].'

Hanan from Damascus, Syria speaking in the UK, April 2015⁶

BEYOND HUMANITARIAN SOLUTIONS

A generation ago, one woman said that bluntly. As UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata struggled to cope with the human misery caused by the genocides in Rwanda and Bosnia, she said that *'there are no humanitarian solutions to humanitarian problems'*.

That truth has been almost completely forgotten in the preparations for the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. Millions of words have been written about how to make further administrative changes to international aid. Hundreds of papers have agonized over how to provide aid in fragile or failed states.

But these simple truths have been largely forgotten:

- That to the men, women and children struggling in humanitarian crises, **a failed state is one that fails to fulfil its responsibility to ensure its citizens' access to aid and protection**; and
- To the men, women and children who have just survived this year's typhoon, flood or other disaster, **a failed world is one that allows climate change to overwhelm the world's most vulnerable people**.

Humanitarians must not only complete the reforms they have promised for years. They must challenge the world to tackle the drivers of humanitarian crises, and rekindle outrage at the atrocities and obstacles that stop vulnerable people reaching the aid they urgently need. And perhaps most of all, they must help give a voice to the millions of people struggling in humanitarian crises so often ignored by those in power. For if humanitarians do not seek to do this, who will?



Prolonged drought in Turkana, Kenya, killed livestock and made pastoralist communities dependent on food aid. Here Ikai and her mother Ester Longlomoe walk home with food rations given to them by friends, March 2011. Photo: Andy Hall

More people are displaced by conflict and violence than at any time since the Second World War.⁷

But the soaring crisis of global displacement is not just caused by war. In 2013, 22m people were displaced by disasters caused by natural hazards.⁸ In 2012, 98% of human displacement was triggered by climate- and weather-related hazards (83% over the five years up to then).⁹

'The drought affected us in so many ways. There was thirst. We spent most of our time just searching for water. The borehole dried up. The livestock died.'

Esther Idoko, Lokore, Turkana, Kenya

CAN THE SUMMIT DELIVER?

For the UN, governments and NGOs to spend so much time preparing for the Summit only to deliver well-meaning words and no practical, concrete recommendations and agreements would be shameful.

One Summit cannot change everything. Humanitarian crises will continue growing unless governments also succeed – to use a crucial example – at this December’s global conference on climate change in Paris, and more generally tackle the injustices that drive humanitarian crises. But the World Humanitarian Summit can and must achieve something, and the fundamental tests of its integrity and success are as follows.

Key test 1: Demand that states are held to account for their international obligations on assistance and protection

Too many governments – and other armed groups – fall woefully short of their fundamental responsibilities under international law to protect their citizens from atrocities and to allow them unhindered access to aid. Some purposefully attack, trap or starve civilians as weapons of war. The Summit must reaffirm existing international law in the strongest possible terms, to help influence the practical steps that must be taken in real crises in the years to come. The Summit must:

- Reaffirm the fundamental principles of humanity, impartiality and independence, which reflect the universal human heritage of helping other human beings in distress;
- Reaffirm the vital international legal obligation of states to ensure affected civilians’ access to assistance and protection – and condemn the fact that it has not been fulfilled in a significant proportion of humanitarian crises, and that the world has not united behind effective action to help change this;
- Reaffirm the international legal obligation to grant refuge to those fleeing violence, conflict and persecution, and the need to substantially increase international support to help countries neighbouring the world’s worst humanitarian crises to fulfil their responsibilities;
- Set out a new means to monitor and expose the failures of states to uphold international law in these respects, which the new UN Secretary-General in 2017 could help lead.

Wealthy countries in particular should go beyond their basic legal obligations to help more refugees reach protection outside their regions of origin. It cannot be right that less developed countries and regions host 86 percent of the world’s refugees.¹² What this means may be different for each crisis, but Oxfam’s call for wealthy countries to offer resettlement or humanitarian admission to at least five percent of refugees from Syria in the past¹³ – and a higher figure will almost certainly be needed in future – shows what a more humane approach to global displacement might look like.

Key test 2: Set out new ways to support local action

During 2007–13, less than 2 percent of annual humanitarian aid went directly to local organizations,¹⁴ such as the members of the Humanitarian Response Consortium in the Philippines that responded to the county’s recent typhoons.¹⁵

The ‘average’ displaced person in the world has been displaced since the twentieth century.¹⁰

...most wealthy countries still refuse to welcome more than a fraction of refugees. In 2014, 26% of refugees were hosted by countries in Asia, 26% in Africa, 21% in the Middle East, 22% in Europe, 3% in North America.¹¹

In 2014, while national governments received only 3 percent of all international humanitarian aid reported through the UN, the share given directly to national and local NGOs was even less, falling from 0.4 percent in 2012 to a derisory 0.2 percent.¹⁶

'We're responsible. We'll take the lead. We'll clean up the destruction.'

Apurba Mehrab Srabon,
Mymensigh, Bangladesh

Box 1: Local civil society after Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines

'I was attending a UN meeting and heard that the area we were working in was considered hard-to-reach. But it's on the main road. And we travel there every day! Perhaps it's hard-to-reach by international rather than national standards. While there are security issues for international organizations...National NGOs are better able to move around.'

Local humanitarian worker, Samar Province

The aid that was distributed directly by the [local government] targeted only some of those most in need of assistance. Those areas that had been lobbying against the mining companies [which the government supported] were missed out. We targeted these areas and others that needed assistance.

Local humanitarian worker, Leyte Province

Source: A. Featherstone and C. Antequisa (2014) 'Missed Again: making space for partnership in the Typhoon Haiyan response', Christian Aid, Cafod, Oxfam, Tearfund and Actionaid, <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/Images/Missed-Again-Typhoon-Haiyan-September-2014.pdf>, p9

There is no way to know how many aid dollars are lost in the UN and international NGO 'middle men' of the humanitarian world. Their role *is* vital – to support local actors, address global challenges, and work directly where local actors cannot do so alone; but a higher proportion of international aid should get to the front line. In many places, local groups face grave challenges, but the lesson of almost every recent crisis is that greater support for local leadership, wherever possible, would make aid more effective, responsive and accountable.¹⁷ That is why it is increasingly recognized that humanitarian action should follow the idea of 'subsidiarity', in which local, national, regional and international organisations all have vital roles to play, and wherever possible, they support the efforts of affected people themselves to cope and recover from crises.¹⁸

The Summit must therefore encourage governments and other humanitarian donors to:

- Dedicate, by 2020, at least 10 percent of their global humanitarian funding to strengthen the capacity of local and national NGOs to lead humanitarian action – and set out practical strategies to help build that capacity. That funding will of course vary considerably from country to country depending on its circumstances;
- Make every aid dollar count – by maximizing the amount that gets to the local and sometimes international agencies directly providing aid on the ground. The UN and international NGO 'middle men' between donors and 'doers' have a vital role to play, but every possible effort should be made to reduce the costs that are deducted from aid on its way to the people in need.

The Summit should encourage the UN, and in particular UNOCHA, UNDP and the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction to:

- Work with countries, including their governments, local NGOs and civil society, to develop national strategies for disaster response, preparedness and risk reduction *that uphold all citizens' rights to assistance and protection* – setting out cost projections and the national budget allocations required.

And the Summit should encourage all donors to:

- Help ensure those plans that uphold citizens' rights are fully funded by using their ODA to fill any gaps.

Key test 3: Reverse the growing gap between aid needed and given

International humanitarian aid has substantially grown – but it has failed to keep pace with the demand from climate-related disasters, and from new conflicts such as in Syria. Since 2000, donor governments have, on average, met less than two-thirds of the needs set out in UN humanitarian appeals.¹⁹ Such shortfalls have devastating consequences: in late 2014, the World Food Programme suspended food aid to 1.7m Syrian refugees when it ran out of money, and was only able to reinstate its assistance after a fundraising effort on social media.²⁰

Figure 1²¹



IN 2013, THE WORLD SPENT \$60BN ON ICE CREAM...ALMOST THREE TIMES AS MUCH AS IT DID ON HUMANITARIAN AID.

Yet even in these times of austerity, the cost to donor governments of filling this gap would be relatively small. The UN Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing will report in November 2015 and help to frame the Summit's discussions. Neither should be afraid of making truly bold recommendations to increase predictable humanitarian funding. Governments pay vital mandatory dues to everybody from the UN to the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, but leave humanitarian appeals to rely on uncertain funding, which is starkly unequal between different crises.

The Summit should:

- Encourage the UN to bring forward proposals for more predictable funding – perhaps some form of assessed contributions – a percentage of which could be dedicated to developing local capacity to complement voluntary contributions.



Maria and Santos outside their home, newly built to protect against floods, Beni, Bolivia.
Photo: Peter Tecks/Oxfam.

'It will be safe in the new house because the floods will not reach it. Last time it flooded the water rose an extra metre.'

Maria, Beni, Bolivia

Key test 4: determine new ways to reduce the risk of future disasters

Since 2000, disasters have caused damage costing an average of \$100bn each year.²³ National governments, funded through progressive taxation, must lead the way in reducing this vast economic and human cost; and international donors must do far more to support them. Yet the promise to help countries build their resilience to future disasters has not been delivered. In the three decades to 2010, only 0.4 percent of total official development assistance was spent on reducing the risk of disasters.²⁴

The Summit should encourage all national governments to:

- Lead effective strategies to build their people's resilience to future disasters, ensuring that all government policies reduce future risks or at least avoid creating new risks, and that risk analysis is integral to decisions on public and private investment.

It should encourage international donors to:

- Collectively contribute, by 2020, at least \$5bn of total global annual aid – because reducing risk is not solely a humanitarian challenge – to help countries vulnerable to disasters build their resilience and reduce the risk of future disasters. That funding may of course vary considerably from country to country, and many countries may call on donors to fund substantially more to help them become less vulnerable to disasters;
- Ensure that development, not just humanitarian, aid tackles the inequalities that make people more vulnerable to the shocks and stresses that they face, and increase development work in protracted crises and those societies facing the greatest risks.

These goals would focus a reasonable proportion of aid on some of the most vulnerable people in the world. It is vital to ensure of course that donor countries do *not* cut other vital aid priorities, and they have no legitimate reason to do so. The great majority of wealthy countries, even in these difficult times, should contribute more in total official development assistance; and every government must recognize that climate finance for mitigation and adaptation must be fully additional to development aid.

By the 2030s, much more of the world – large parts of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia – will be exposed to droughts, floods and other hazards. 325m people in extreme poverty will live in the most exposed areas.²²

In the 20 years to 2010, the world spent \$14bn on reducing the risk of disasters – less than 1% of the \$2.3tn of disaster losses.²⁵

Long before this year's earthquakes in Nepal, the Nepal Red Cross estimated that for every \$1 spent on DRR almost \$4 would be saved in future disaster response.²⁶

NOTES

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- 2 The figure for access to water is for the fiscal year 2013–14.
- 3 UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2015) Global Humanitarian Overview, Status Report, June 2015, p. 3: https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/GHO-status_report-FINAL.pdf
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- 5 Unless otherwise sourced, all quotes in this paper are from Oxfam's Words and Pictures library, a collection of stories and images of people Oxfam works with around the world.
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- 14 T.R. Gingerich and M.J. Cohen (2015) 'Turning the Humanitarian System on its Head: Saving lives and livelihoods by strengthening local capacity and shifting leadership to local actors', Oxford: Oxfam.
- 15 As an example of the mixed record of international aid in working with local organizations, please see: A. Featherstone and C. Antequisa (2014) Missed Again: making space for partnership in the Typhoon Haiyan response, Christian Aid, Cafod, Oxfam, Tearfund and Actionaid, <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/Images/Missed-Again-Typhoon-Haiyan-September-2014.pdf>
- 16 Development Initiatives (2015), Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2015, *ibid.*, p. 5.
- 17 For a more thorough analysis of local humanitarian action, please Oxfam (2015) op. cit.
- 18 For example, please see the draft Irish Humanitarian Agenda that is being developed through Ireland's consultation process for the World Humanitarian Summit.
- 19 Calculated using data from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Financial Tracking Service database (OCHA FTS) <http://fts.unocha.org>. There are problems with using UN appeals as a proxy for humanitarian needs, as they do not necessarily reflect the results of rigorous assessments and are issued only if external assistance is requested. Nevertheless, they are the broadest measure available. As noted in Development Initiatives (2014) op. cit., there are multiple initiatives underway to improve the quality of needs assessment.
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Oxfam Community Support Workers teach children in West Point, Monrovia how important it is to wash their hands to help prevent contracting Ebola, West Point, Monrovia, Liberia, 2014. Photo: Abbie Trayler-Smith/Oxfam

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