

What does climate change adaptation mean for humanitarian assistance?

Guiding principles for policy makers and practitioners

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A key objective of the project is to develop guiding principles for how humanitarian interventions can better contribute to climate change adaptation in terms of use of information about complex climate and vulnerability contexts in operational decisions. These guiding principles are based on the rationale that:

Climate change intersects with humanitarian crises and how they are handled in four main ways:

First, many disasters are climate-related;

second, climate change may contribute to social changes such as poverty patterns that influence the nature of humanitarian crises;

third, how a non-climatic disaster is handled is critical for how vulnerable a community may be to future climate events; and

fourth, humanitarian actions influence any move towards climate resilient development pathways.

Hence, incremental adjustments to current practices and structures is not enough in the face of climate change; there is a need to turn the policy focus to the underlying causes of vulnerability and risk but also the development pathways themselves that create these risks.

Humanitarian actions, while they often have a short term and ‘neutral’ intentions, necessarily form part of the actions that comprise development pathways, by reinforcing or altering practices, social structures and norms. Humanitarian actions also potentially open up new opportunities for transformational change. First, humanitarian organisations have vulnerability reduction and vulnerable groups as their main focus and mandate; second, humanitarian actors often have high contextual knowledge; and third, many organisations are shifting towards longer term approaches.

Definitions of climate change adaptation and humanitarian assistance

Climate change adaptation can be generally defined as “The process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects. In human systems, adaptation seeks to moderate or avoid harm or exploit beneficial opportunities. In some natural systems, human intervention may facilitate adjustment to expected climate and its effects.” (Agard et al. eds. 2014, p. 1758).

Humanitarian assistance is generally accepted to mean the aid and action designed to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain and protect human dignity during and in the aftermath of man-made crises and natural disasters, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for the occurrence of such situations (Source: Good Humanitarian Donorship). What marks it out from other forms of aid and foreign assistance is that it should be guided by the principles of:

- humanity – saving human lives and alleviating suffering wherever it is found
- impartiality – acting solely on the basis of need, without discrimination between or within affected populations
- neutrality – acting without favouring any side in an armed conflict or other dispute where such action is carried out
- independence – the autonomy of humanitarian objectives from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.

(<http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/data-guides/defining-humanitarian-aid/>)



Photos from the case study in Nepal (Sigrid Nagoda) and Pakistan (Awais Arifeen) showing: 1) women carry stones for a WFP projects in a village in Humla (Nepal), 2) Bags of rice that are to be distributed in Humla (Nepal) 3) A man stands next to his abandoned house that was damaged by debris flow in Baltistan region of Northern Pakistan 4) Once a village's forest and pasture but now a river bed: A village faces risk of erosion by river Indus in Baltistan, Pakistan

KEY QUESTIONS: UNDERSTAND AND RESPOND TO THE DRIVERS OF VULNERABILITY

The guiding principles outline questions to be posed at various stages of planning, implementing and evaluating humanitarian interventions (further detailed in Nagoda and Eriksen, in progress). The five principles of sustainable adaptation described in Eriksen, et al. (2011) and Eriksen and Marin (2011) frame these questions, exemplified below:

Principle 1. Recognize the context for vulnerability, including multiple stressors (stressors other than climate change)

Given that responses should be sensitive to the wider vulnerability context, including multiple stressors that contribute to vulnerability, the analysis should attempt to answer the following key questions:

- *What are the main reasons for being vulnerable (Castes, women, poverty, disability...)?*
- *What factors other than climate change (political, social, economic and environmental), contribute to their vulnerability? How do these processes interact and influence people differently?*
- *What are the historical, cultural and political processes that have shaped the vulnerability of individuals or groups?*
- *Which interventions have been carried out before? Which projects/programmes have been considered successful? Why and for whom?*

Principle 2. Acknowledge that differing values and interests affect adaptation outcomes

Given that responses should take into account that different actors have different values and interests that may affect adaptation outcomes, the mapping should attempt to answer the following key questions:

- *Which are the main groups/ actors with an interest in adaptation programs and their outcomes in the region?*
- *What are the main differences in needs/interests between different groups?*
- *How/to what extent are the views/interests of the most vulnerable groups taken into account in national/international climate change adaptation policies and approaches?*

Principle 3. Integrate local knowledge into adaptation responses

Given that successful responses need to have conscious approach towards which knowledge is recognized and how it is used in project design and decision-making, the strategy should attempt to give answers to the following key questions:

- *What are the different interests and needs at local level and what are the reasons for this diversity of “local” knowledge (also note the different conflicts and how these are negotiated at local, regional level)?*
- *How can programs ensure that the different types of local knowledge are integrated with other sources of knowledge when planning projects and formulating policies?*
- *And in particular, what can be done to ensure that the voices of the most vulnerable are taken into account within the formulation and the implementation of policies and programs at both local and national levels?*

Principle 4. Consider potential feedbacks between local and global processes.

Given that responses to reduce vulnerability do not happen in isolation but may directly or indirectly influence and be influenced by larger scale processes, the strategy should attempt to give answers to the following key questions:

- *What are the potential effects of national and international programmes at the local level?*
- *How do organisations work across scale? What are the other ongoing processes addressing development and adaptation in the region and how do these processes coordinate at national, regional and local level (see different actors/ministries/lines agencies involved etc...)?*

Principle 5. Empower vulnerable groups in influencing development pathways and their climate change outcomes

Given that marginalisation and social exclusion are important reasons shaping vulnerability processes, the strategy should attempt to give answer to the following keys questions:

- *Who are the most vulnerable and what are their context (situation) that make them vulnerable?*
- *What are the political, economical, cultural and social processes that hinder the most vulnerable to influence decision making processes at local, regional and national level?*
- *What are the opportunities that exist within the humanitarian action in question to support their active participation in influencing development pathways*