Helpdesk Research Report

Funding appeals for complex humanitarian emergencies

Evie Browne

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Question

Based on a sample of high value protracted complex emergency humanitarian appeals and responses please provide information on: (i) the factors that contribute to the sums requested and the coverage of appeals; (ii) characteristics of how the appeal sums and their coverage changed over time as the crises evolved.

Contents

1. Overview

This rapid review identifies some of the political economy factors which affect funding decisions in protracted complex humanitarian emergencies. These are usually understood as 'a multifaceted humanitarian crisis in a country, region or society where there is total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from internal or external conflict and which requires a multi-sectoral, international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single agency and/or the ongoing United Nations country programme' (Inter-Agency Standing Committee 1994, cited in OCHA 2002).

While there is plenty of information available on the amounts requested and given, broken down by donor agencies, countries, sources, and occasionally sectors, there is much less publically available information on how and why donors arrive at these specific amounts. It is likely that these discussions remain internal to funding agencies. Most available literature examines the impact of programmes, or provides data on value of disbursements, rather than the reasons behind the decisions. In general, the literature does not comment much on which sectors or groups receive funding, but provides a higher-level overview of total

sums and country-level funding. This makes it difficult to establish which, if any, demographics leverage more or less funding.

It is possible to derive some key factors from the available literature. Most of these apply both to original appeal sums and in stimulating changes in existing funding. There is no clear divide between these two categories, especially in protracted crisis situations, where agencies can work on an issue for a long time. The determining factors are:

- **Needs-based allocation**: This is a core principle of humanitarian assistance. All funders use needs assessments in their original funding allocations, and many changes to funding are preceded by needs assessments.

- **Tipping points**: Most protracted crises receive a steady and/or low level of funding but experience sudden increases in funding flows if a particular incident or need rapidly escalates the situation.

- **Geopolitical concerns**: Different crises receive different amounts of funding depending on their strategic importance to donor countries.

- **Resilience**: There is a general global shift towards more funding for resilience rather than emergency response in protracted crises. This can cause funding changes during a crisis, when opportunities to develop resilience become available.

- **Media and public interest**: A high level of interest usually stimulates funding, but complex and protracted emergencies rarely draw the necessary public and media interest.

- **Sector priority**: Certain sectors receive more funding as they are perceived as life-saving. Some are continually under-funded.

- **Absorptive capacity**: Funders usually work with local implementing partners and these are only able to absorb and use a certain amount of funds.

The paper outlines a number of case studies and provides links to a few websites which keep up-to-date statistics on funding.

An overview of the main funding mechanisms for protracted crises can be found in a previous Helpdesk report: '*Multi-Year Funding to Humanitarian Organisations in Protracted Crises*' (Walton, 2011).

2. Contributing factors and changes over time

Needs based allocation

The primary force determining funding allocations should be people's needs, as outlined in Principle 6 of the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative: 'Allocate humanitarian funding in proportion to needs and on the basis of needs assessments' (de Geoffroy & Grunewald, 2008). This underpins most of the actions undertaken in humanitarian crises and should be considered a building block of all funding decisions. In practice, needs assessments are not as established or influential as they should be. Von Schreeb et al (2008) find that needs assessments were only included in around 30 per cent of humanitarian health project applications submitted to Sida in 2003. In contrast, staff said that the capacity of the implementing agency was a more important factor.

Funding choices can be affected not only by humanitarian need, but by political choices, cultural ties, and media coverage, among others (GHA 2013). In regional reviews, it is possible to see that when attention shifts towards a new disaster, funding drops away from existing programmes, as happened for Sub-Saharan African programmes when the Haiti earthquake hit in 2010 (GHA 2013: 43). This demonstrates that donors make choices based not only on need, but also by how much they are willing to give in total (GHA 2013: 46).

Tipping points

It is very clear that high profile emergencies such as Haiti and the Indian Ocean tsunami receive funding more quickly than slow-onset crises, which receive low levels of funding over a longer time (GHA 2013: 85). Global Humanitarian Assistance suggest this is because **donors are risk-averse and demand evidence** of crisis before committing funds, meaning that protracted crises do not reach a significant level of funding until a tipping point is reached. Tipping points can be the passing of a needs threshold, an outbreak of violence, or a media spotlight, among others.

During the recent drought and famine in the Horn of Africa the Somalia Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) reached its peak funding in July 2011. In June, dramatic images of Somali refugees had made worldwide headlines (Valid International, 2012), and in July, the UN declared an official famine (GHA 2013: 84). These events unlocked funds from the international community (Valid International, 2012). The large-scale Disasters Emergency Committee appeal was launched after this point, as it became clear that there was a crisis, and that public appeals were warranted (Valid International, 2012). This response was a clear reaction to public political pressure to respond, felt strongly throughout donors and agencies (Darcy, Bonard, & Dini, 2012).

In Kenya in 2011, early appeals against the food crisis did not receive significant funds as the government had not yet released an official warning (GHA 2013: 85).

A pledging conference in January 2013 significantly increased the funding available for the Syrian crisis (Osborne, 2014a). In June 2013, the UN appeal was revised upwards again due to a sharp increase in the number of refugees, who have increased by 0.5 million people since the beginning of the crisis (Malerba, 2013). A second causal factor is the collapse of the economy, which has created food scarcity and malnutrition (Malerba, 2013). These are the kind of events which can trigger extra funding.

In Yemen, an outbreak of conflict between the government and Al-Qaeda resulted in a UN flash appeal which rapidly increased the volume of funds available to respond (McElhinney, 2014). In South Sudan in 2013, the funding focus shifted to resilience when the number of refugees appeared to be slowing down and there was an improvement in food security (Osborne, 2014b). However, the outbreak of political violence in December 2013 meant the focus shifted back to emergency response (Osborne, 2014b).

These examples show how funding changes over time in response to certain events or new information. However, responding only to tipping points can mean that avoidable crises are not prevented (GHA 2013: 85).

Geopolitical concerns

It is fairly well evidenced that donor funding for emergency assistance is politically strategic and not only driven by need (Fink & Redaelli, 2011). There is less evidence, however, on whether this applies to complex and protracted emergencies, as data tends to focus on natural disasters and short-term crises.

A 2003 paper (Olsen, Carstensen, & Høyen, 2003) explores selected humanitarian crises to support its arguments that reasons for funding are threefold: (i) the intensity of media coverage; (ii) the degree of political interest, particularly related to security, that donor governments have in a particular region; (iii) the strength of humanitarian NGOs and international organisations present in a specific country. It reviews five complex emergencies: Angola, Sudan, the Balkans, DPR of Korea and Afghanistan. The first hypothesis is demonstrated with natural disasters. To illustrate the second hypothesis, the numbers of people in need is estimated (Kosovo 1.5 million; Sudan 2.4 million; Angola 1.8 million) compared to the amount of funding disbursed. Kosovo received twice to three times as much funding as either of the other two countries, demonstrating the allocation of funds by perceived strategic and political importance, particularly fear that violence would spill over into other Yugoslavian countries, and the need for NATO to assert its own importance (2003: 118). This is also borne out by the high levels of assistance given to North Korea and Afghanistan.

The third hypothesis suggests that Sudan and Angola received considerable aid because of the **strong networks of humanitarian actors** already in those countries, which had good operational strengths and absorptive capacity (Olsen, Carstensen, & Høyen, 2003). It is notable that **personnel security** also plays a role in where donors are willing to operate. For conflict-affected countries, it appears that humanitarian spending increases where there is a presence of multilateral peacekeeping operations, due to improved security and stability (GHA 2013: 79).

In Somalia, US aid funding decreased by 88 per cent after **counter-terrorism legislation** was introduced in 2009, and agencies were unable to guarantee that some funding would not find its way to terrorist groups (GHA 2013: 85). This had a huge impact on the total volume of aid delivered to Somalia. This requirement was loosened in response to the 2011 famine, when it appeared to be felt that countering the crisis was more important than geopolitical concerns (Darcy et al., 2012).

The USA has been explicit about its political objectives in some places. In the ongoing Syrian crisis, Congress has discussed branding humanitarian relief items in order that recipients might know assistance is from America (Margesson & Chesser, 2014).

Aid to Sudan saw a significant increase in funding from governments around the 2005 signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), to support the **stabilisation and reconstruction process** (Development Initiatives, 2011). After the CPA, there was a shift away from humanitarian assistance towards development funding (Development Initiatives, 2011).

In South Sudan, the sectoral breakdown of aid shows that the vast majority has gone to social infrastructure and services, increasing tenfold over time (Development Initiatives, 2011). Within this sector, most is directed towards **government and civil society**, which has increased twentyfold over time, notably after the 2005 CPA (Development Initiatives, 2011). This sector includes capacity-building government and civil society; supporting elections; security system management and reform; post-conflict peace-building; demining and demobilisation of child soldiers (Development Initiatives, 2011). This is consistent with the development of the peace process and establishing the new Government of South Sudan.

Resilience

In general there is a move towards preventative, longer-term, development-focused programming in areas of chronic and recurring crisis, with the aim of enhancing resilience rather than responding to crisis. This is gaining traction, but governments find it easier to justify emergency relief than preventative programming,

and resilience does not receive sufficient funding (GHA 2013: 87). In 2011, resilience projects were only 27 per cent fully funded (GHA 2013: 87).

In 2012 the EU changed its strategy to launch a resilience programme to improve responses to persistent emergencies (GHA 2013: 86). Yemen is a designated flagship country for the EU's resilience programming, and new initiatives are underway in 2014 to establish mechanisms for funding resilience within humanitarian assistance (McElhinney, 2014). After the initial slow response to the 2011 Horn of Africa drought and famine, several agencies reacted by including more resilience and recovery programmes in their responses (GHA 2013: 86).

The Consolidated Appeals Process has recently changed to allow **three-year appeals instead of one-year**, perhaps representing a shift towards more forward planning in protracted crises (Smith & Swithern, 2013), rather than short-term reactive appeals. Somalia and South Sudan have both recently launched three-year appeals, the first countries to do so. The annual amounts requested for South Sudan over the three years are about the same as previously – USD 1.1 billion every year – so there is no significant change in amount of funding, just its predictability (Osborne, 2014b).

Other factors

An analysis of Danish newspaper fundraising appeal advertisements supports the idea that **media coverage and public interest** play a strong role (Vestergaard, 2013). It suggests that there needs to be some prior level of media interest before development agencies can place adverts and thus fundraise. In the UK, public appeals are only launched if the agencies have established that there is enough public interest (expert comments). The sums requested are therefore rather dependent on interest, whether generated or simply propagated by news media. Within this discourse, intense and dramatic events are likely to garner more media attention than protracted and slowly unfolding crises. Complex emergencies rarely draw international attention (Vestergaard, 2013). Vestergaard (2013) suggests that humanitarian organisations respond to the agenda-setting by the media by focusing on media-friendly crises, and not attempting to fundraise for 'forgotten crises' or situations of greater need.

One study reviews the funding allocated specifically to protection activities in complex humanitarian emergencies (Murray & Landry, 2013). It finds that **protection is always less funded** than food, water, health and other sectors perceived to be life-saving. Funding is also more volatile, which the authors ascribe to the varying weight given to protection in different emergencies, and the range of definitions of 'protection'. The changes in funding are not necessarily consciously planned by donors, and this study illustrates the external circumstances outside of donors' control which affect funding. Within this sector, the paper draws several conclusions based on these trends:

- 'Protection' is defined differently by different actors, and is difficult to communicate to the public in a way which will resonate.

- Results are hard to measure, and there is no track record of reporting on outcomes.

- Donors tend to consider crises through country or partner allocations, but rarely through sectors, and do not usually fundraise for specific sectors.

- These reasons make it hard for protection to gain political and financial traction, and difficult to use as a fundraising or funding concept (Murray & Landry, 2013).

3. Case studies

Somalia

Somalia exemplifies several of the funding factors described above. In addition, it has suffered from **access problems** for some years. For example, CARE was expelled from Al Shabaab controlled areas in 2008, and World Food Programme in 2010 (Hobbs et al., 2012). This has significantly reduced the capacity of humanitarian actors to deliver aid and the level of assistance they can provide was not sufficient to prevent the 2011 famine (Hobbs et al., 2012).

Hobbs et al. (2012) provide an overview of how and why humanitarian actors made food security decisions, in the first phase of response from early to mid-2011, and the second phase after the Famine Declaration in July 2011. In the first phase, actors reported feeling that national assessments did not indicate a significant increase in the existing levels of need. In contrast to national reports, local level information appeared to show a worsening situation, although the information provided was conflicting. Thus some actors scaled up responses and some continued at the usual level. At this stage, actors were not calling for more funding, as a crisis was not yet clearly underway. No new funding was made available, so programmes had to choose whether to reallocate resources within their existing budgets.

In June 2011, it became apparent that a **famine was imminent**, and nearly all humanitarian actors undertook a rapid assessment. Once famine was officially declared, emergency funding became immediately available and released many of the operating constraints for existing actors. This funding was the highest level Somalia had ever received, and caused a significant expansion in coverage. As well as scale-up of existing programmes, new food, cash and voucher programmes were introduced, largely dictated by organisational capacity and expertise. The revision of the CAP in mid-2011 caused some concern among agencies about their capacity to absorb such an increase (Darcy et al., 2012).

Syria

The combined Syrian Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP) for people inside the country; the Syria Regional Response Plan (RRP) for refugees in the region; and the Lebanese and Jordanian government appeals make Syria the largest ever UN appeal to date at USD 6.5 billion (Osborne, 2014a). The appeals have been revised at least six times to date, but remain less than 10 per cent funded (Margesson & Chesser, 2014).

The SHARP has priorities of providing relief supplies; assisting IDPs and host communities; and reconstruction of infrastructure (Margesson & Chesser, 2014). The RRP has priorities of protection; life-saving assistance; access to basic services; durable solutions; community outreach to refugees residing in urban areas; and support to host communities (Margesson & Chesser, 2014).

The humanitarian community was **slow to respond to the initial crisis**, as the focus was on a political solution rather than considering the possibility of a protracted crisis (Osborne, 2014a). The 2011 funding amounted to USD 38 million, which is minimal (Osborne, 2014a).

In the beginning of the crisis, the CERF disbursed USD 3.7 million through the rapid response window, which largely went to humanitarian aid agencies (Osborne, 2014a). As the fighting increased in 2012 and refugee numbers began to increase in neighbouring countries, the CERF provided an additional USD 7 million to Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon to help them cope with these populations (Osborne, 2014a).

It is notable that Turkey's humanitarian assistance increased considerably in 2012. It gave USD 1 billion, of which 94 per cent went to Syria, and which constitutes 40 per cent of Turkey's total ODA budget (Osborne, 2014a). The GHA suggests that a large proportion of this was spent on hosting Syrian refugees in Turkey.

Yemen

DFID's assistance to Yemen is an example of how assistance can change over time, where the key factors are recognising long-term need, and developing and responding to the capacity of implementing partners. A recent paper provides an overview of the assistance given since 2010 (McElhinney, 2014).

Under the usual single-year strategies, DFID provided GBP 7.5 million in 2010-11; GBP 20 million in 2011-12; and GBP 33.2 million in 2012-13. In 2013, when multi-year strategies became available, it has moved to a GBP 70 million programme to run from 2013 to 2015. This programme will provide emergency food assistance, shelter, water, and assist people recovering from conflict. This shift is based both on **needs assessments and the growing capacity and trust** in implementing partners. It is hoped that the longer-term financing will reduce risks by helping organisations plan better; provide value for money through economies of scale; build better relationships with communities; and build staff capacity. This new form of humanitarian funding is highly appropriate for protracted crises, where short-term assistance is not adequate for needs.

This paper suggests that early warning signals such as sudden price increases should be a trigger for releasing funds, rather than waiting for the completion of a needs assessment. This would avoid the 'tipping point' situation outlined above. DFID is beginning to adopt 'crisis modifiers' in Yemen – triggers which signify that a change in funding and programming is necessary (McElhinney, 2014).

4. Data sources

Global Humanitarian Assistance

http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/
GHA provides independent data on humanitarian financing and aid flows. Its annual reports provide a comprehensive assessment of international response to humanitarian crises, and it provides reports on selected appeals and situations.

Financial Tracking Service

http://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=home
UN OCHA provides this database which tracks all reported international humanitarian aid, with a focus on consolidated and flash appeals.

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Expert contributors

Rachel Scott, OECD DAC
Julia Brothwell, British Red Cross
David Hudson, UCL

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