INTRODUCTION

An approach that focuses on strengthening the resilience of communities and households can increase the impact and cost effectiveness of humanitarian and development assistance. A shared commitment to this approach can help prevent humanitarian crises and provide faster and more sustainable solutions to crises when they occur. Resilience is a concept that all relevant partners – including governments, humanitarian and development actors, and donors – can use as an organising framework for their joint work and to increase mutual accountability. This paper explains what adopting a resilience-focused approach means for humanitarian assistance and what contribution the international humanitarian system and OCHA can make to strengthen resilience.

DEFINITION AND PROGRAMMATIC APPROACH

Resilience refers to the ability of communities and households to endure stresses and shocks.[1] Communities and households are resilient when they are able to meet their basic needs in a sustainable way and without reliance on external assistance. Resilience is therefore 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; 3) the ability to anticipate, prevent, prepare for and respond to stresses and shocks without compromising their long-term prospects.

Programmatic activities that build resilience of vulnerable communities and households are not new. They include activities that fall into the categories of: disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness, livelihood support, and social protection, including the provision of basic services (Figure 1).[2] The activities that are most effective in strengthening resilience will be context-specific and dependent on local risks and capacities. As such, honest and impartial analysis, including all relevant stakeholders, is the starting point for appropriate engagement in resilience.

PRINCIPLES FOR STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE

Build national and local capacity. Efforts to build resilience should be led by national governments wherever possible, and supported by regional and international partners. Supporting local structures and participation of communities are critical components in building resilience. When international actors provide services, it should be done in a way that strengthens national and local capacity to provide those services independently in the future.

Make long commitments and strategic plans. Building resilience is a long-term, development-oriented process, which requires the sustained commitment of all relevant actors. International partners should support governments to develop comprehensive national plans and align their support behind those plans in a coordinated manner and according to their comparative advantage. Plans need to be flexible enough to react quickly to deteriorating situations and be supported by strategic and flexible financing from both humanitarian and development budgets.

Shift away from the relief to development paradigm. A linear, phased approach to relief, recovery and development has not been successful in preventing recurrent emergencies in regions of chronic vulnerability or in making sustained improvements in protracted emergencies. A more integrated approach is needed that simultaneously and coherently addresses short, medium and long term needs.

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[1] UNISDR – The ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate to and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions.
[2] Disaster Risk Reduction involves systematic efforts to analyse and manage the causal factors of (natural and man-made) disasters, including through reduced exposure to hazards, reduced vulnerability of people and assets, and improved preparedness. Livelihood support interventions can be used at all stages of an emergency to protect, restore, promote, diversify and adapt livelihood strategies. Social protection aims to enhance the capacity of poor and vulnerable people to manage economic and social risks and provide a safety net in times of need.

AN ENABLING AID FRAMEWORK

Strengthening resilience takes time and requires a comprehensive, multi-sectoral and coordinated approach. No single actor or sector can strengthen the long-term resilience of vulnerable households and communities and households by acting alone. National and international actors are already implementing and supporting activities that strengthen resilience. However, these activities need to be better coordinated and supported by an enabling aid framework that maximizes the contribution of international actors in support of national and local efforts.

Planning and coordination. Strengthening resilience requires coherent planning of short term interventions that meet basic needs and medium and longer term programming that increases the coping capacity of communities and households and addresses the structural causes of vulnerability. National, development and humanitarian planning processes need to be more closely aligned. Planning and coordination should be led by governments wherever possible and involve all relevant actors, including civil society and donors. Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators should take the lead in ensuring that the contribution of all international actors is coherent and supports national objectives and capacities. International partners should identify and build the capacity of national counterparts to lead planning and coordination processes.

Finance. Strengthening resilience is cost effective, with long term savings over humanitarian response.[3] Funding for activities that increase resilience should come primarily from development budgets, which need to be more flexible to adapt to changing circumstances. Humanitarian funding mechanisms may need to be adjusted to ensure they support the contribution of humanitarian assistance to strengthening resilience. However, the focus should be on providing additional, multi-year financing for activities that strengthen resilience, rather than on expanding the reach of humanitarian funding. The exact mechanism for delivering funding will be country-specific and will depend on factors including the scale and type of needs, national capacity, and the political and operating environment. Where possible, it should be decided through a process involving the government, the Resident Coordinator and donors. Donors should improve coherence between humanitarian and development budgets and be more willing to take risks when investing in resilience in unstable institutional environments.

ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM

Organisations that constitute the international humanitarian system are already implementing programmes that build resilience. Most do not recognise a dichotomy between their 'humanitarian' and 'development' functions. Although the humanitarian system – namely the structures and mechanisms for humanitarian planning, coordination and financing – should not be the primary channel for resilience-building activities, it has an important contribution to make based on its comparative advantage. Its primary functions in building resilience should be:

- **Emergency Preparedness**. Preparedness for emergencies forms an important part of disaster risk reduction and is often undertaken by humanitarian actors. Effective preparedness can mitigate the effects of shocks and stresses on communities and households. Preparedness includes ensuring that humanitarian agencies can respond quickly and effectively to emergencies, as well as building the capacity of national and local actors to respond themselves.

- **Early Action**. Making earlier, more effective responses to deteriorating situations can support communities and households to respond to shocks and stresses in ways that do not erode their capacity to cope with future risks. Late humanitarian responses undermine other investments to strengthen resilience. However, despite the increasing availability of early warning, humanitarian responses are often late and dominated by 'emergency' programming, which is not effective in saving livelihoods or building resilience.

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[3] A study commissioned by DFID on Kenya and Ethiopia found that for every $1 spent on resilience, $2.9 of benefits (avoided aid and animal losses, development benefits) are gained. When this is modelled over just a 10-year time frame – in other words, within the context of two high magnitude droughts - every $1 spent on resilience generates $2 in benefits.

- **Early Recovery approaches.** Households with access to a broad range of resources and networks will be able pursue a variety of strategies in times of crisis. Understanding and supporting these strategies through livelihood support and emergency safety nets should be much more central to humanitarian programming. Ensuring access to basic services, governance, and security are also important in promoting sustainable recovery. These approaches have often been referred to as 'early recovery' and are critical to building resilience. However, they have remained underfunded and 'sectorised', rather than being fully integrated into humanitarian programming.

Wherever possible, activities for strengthening resilience should be nationally led and supported through the development system and funding channels. However, in certain situations – for example in complex emergencies or where government capacity is extremely weak – the humanitarian system may need to temporarily play a lead role in planning, coordinating and financing of programming that builds resilience. Conversely, there may be certain situations, such as environments of ongoing conflict, where humanitarian actors may have to distance themselves from resilience efforts in order to preserve the impartiality and neutrality of their needs-based response and ensure that assistance is not politically driven. This reinforces the need for resilience programming to be context driven, based on rigorous and up to date analysis.

5 ACTIONS TO INCREASE THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM TO STRENGHTENING RESILIENCE

Strengthening resilience over the long term cannot primarily be the responsibility of humanitarian assistance, which by definition is short term. Resilience is ultimately about avoiding the need for humanitarian assistance. Nevertheless, the humanitarian system can make an increased contribution strengthening resilience through the following actions:
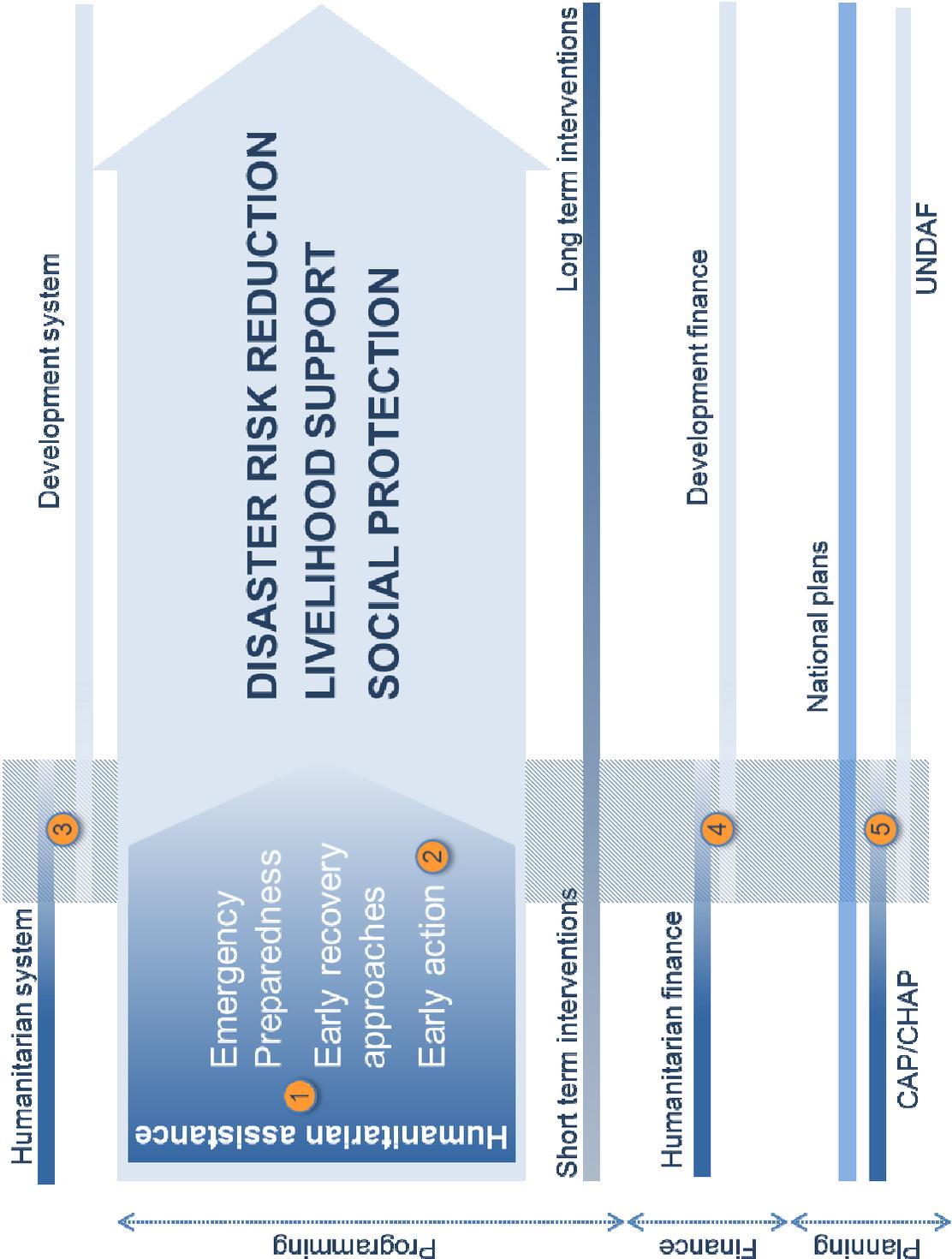
1. **Scale up risk reduction and early recovery approaches and fully integrate them into humanitarian programming**. These approaches should not be the sole responsibility of specific actors or sectors. Clusters (where active) and Humanitarian Coordinators should be responsible for ensuring programming strengthens resilience and developing strategies to build national capacity, as well as exit strategies. These efforts should be supported by increased expert capacity.

2. **Ensure that early warning translates into effective early action** that is not just "emergency programming, but earlier". Early action should consist of low-regrets interventions that build on and support existing livelihood and coping strategies. Early action responses need to be pre-planned as part of an overall strategy. Revisions and implementation should be triggered by appropriate indicators and supported by predictable funding, including from development budgets.

3. **Improve coherence between national, development and humanitarian planning processes**. As appropriate, humanitarian (e.g. CHAP/CAP) and development (e.g. UNDAF) planning processes should be aligned and form coherent components of national plans. This could be the responsibility of a joint planning and coordination cell. Where there is no national humanitarian cycle, regional support should be provided to the long term planning process to ensure that, when required, international humanitarian assistance is predictable and coherent.

4. **Improve humanitarian-development coordination**, particularly on roles and responsibilities in relation to risk reduction, early action, and promoting sustainable recovery. The Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, supported by OCHA and UNDP, should be responsible for ensuring that implementation of humanitarian and development assistance is aligned, mutually reinforcing and supportive of overall national objectives. As a prerequisite for implementing these steps, Humanitarian and Resident Coordinators and UNCT/HCTs need to be better supported in terms of expertise and capacity, either through existing or new mechanisms.

5. **Increase the predictability of financing for programming that strengthens resilience** through both development and humanitarian channels. Finance for strengthening resilience needs to be long-term, predictable and flexible. Multi-year humanitarian Consolidated Appeals can be developed to ensure that planning and funding is aligned with longer-term objectives. Donors should coordinate their contributions to ensure appropriate distribution of funding between countries and regions and to avoid the proliferation of ad hoc initiatives.

ROLE OF OCHA

OCHA already contributes to strengthening resilience through its coordination mandate and preparedness efforts. It will continue to work to strengthen its core functions. In addition, OCHA will:

- **Act as a convener and work with humanitarian and development partners** to develop a common position on resilience, clearly defined roles and responsibilities and appropriate joint coordination and planning mechanisms.

- **Advocate a resilience-based approach** with governments, partners and donors and an effective, appropriate and limited role for the humanitarian system in strengthening resilience.

- **Ensure the appropriate use of humanitarian tools and mechanisms** in strengthening resilience, in consultation with IASC partners. This will include ensuring that humanitarian planning and funding mechanisms effectively support humanitarian contributions to building resilience, but are not expanded to include activities that are outside the scope of humanitarian work.

- **Promote the development of increased capacity** to support Humanitarian and Resident Coordinators and UNCT/HCTs to undertake integrated, strategic humanitarian and development planning of programming that strengthens resilience.

- **Increase its focus on national and local capacity building** to ensure that international humanitarian assistance contributes to long-term improvements, including by involving national and local actors in planning and coordination of assistance whenever appropriate.

- **Develop its role as a strategic coordinator** and ensure that resilience concepts are integrated into the humanitarian programme cycle through the promotion of: 1) effective preparedness and early action; 2) assistance that contributes to building longer-term resilience; and 3) effective links with national and development efforts and structures.

RESILIENCE

Saves lives and livelihoods

Areas for Action

1. Scale up and integrate risk reduction and early recovery approaches into humanitarian programming
2. Ensure that early warning translates into effective early action
3. Improve humanitarian-development coordination
4. Increase finance for programming that strengthens resilience through both humanitarian and development budgets
5. Improve coherence between national, development and humanitarian planning processes

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION
LIVELIHOOD SUPPORT
SOCIAL PROTECTION

Emergency Preparedness
Early recovery approaches
Early action

Humanitarian assistance

Development system

Humanitarian system

Long term interventions

Short term interventions

Development finance

Humanitarian finance

National plans

UNDAF

CAP/CHAP

Programming

Finance

Planning