

# DRAFT

THE UNITED NATIONS  
HUMANITARIAN ROLE IN A FUTURES  
CONTEXT:

INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES AND  
PROMISING OPPORTUNITIES





The objective of the Humanitarian Futures Programme (HFP) at King's College, London is to help those with humanitarian roles and responsibilities to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This means becoming more anticipatory and adaptive, providing an enabling environment for strategic leadership and knowing how to innovate and collaborate more effectively.

## Background

Over the past five years, considerable efforts have been made to reform the humanitarian sector. Increasingly, however, the relevance and effectiveness of these reforms have to be tested against a rapidly changing humanitarian context and criteria. A recent spate of emergencies underscores the point. The Russian heat wave and brushfires in the summer of 2010 that affected wheat exports and ultimately contributed to food riots in Mozambique. the unprecedented scale of the July 2010 Pakistan floods, and the simultaneous Indonesian tsunami, earthquake and volcano eruption. It is by no means certain how key actors in the humanitarian sector should best meet such future challenges, that will increasingly be characterised by a rapid pace of change, uncertainty, and complexity.

With this concern in mind, HFP launched the Integrated Action Plan (IAP) in 2007. Its purpose was and continues to be to assist the UN system to assess and test its capacities for dealing with future humanitarian threats and opportunities. Also, to identify measures that can help it to work in a forward looking, strategic and streamlined manner. In so doing it has focused on the triangular relationship between the UN's Inter-Agency Standing Committee Working Group, six UN Country Teams and host governments in order to determine the extent to which their individual and interactive capacities contributed to the sort of strategic thinking and planning that will be necessary to deal with longer-term threats and a changing humanitarian landscape.

## The Integrated Action Plan (IAP) in practice

HFP, supported by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA) and United Nations Development Programme-Bureau for Crisis Prevention (UNDP-BCPR), with assistance from the Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative (CADRI), engaged with United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) in six countries (Central African Republic, Comoros, Ecuador, Philippines, Tajikistan, Venezuela), the Interagency Standing Committee (IASC), primarily through its Working Group (IASC WG) and governments in the Central African Republic, Comoros,

Tajikistan and Venezuela. This work was undertaken from 2007-2009.

The IAP in the first instance seeks to help organisations assess what have been identified as four core *futures* capacities.<sup>1</sup> namely, (i) competencies within and across the organisation to be anticipatory, or, willing "to plan from the future," (ii) adaptive abilities that result in timely policy and programme adjustments based upon changes in operating environments, (iii) systematic practices for identifying, prioritising and implementing innovations and innovative practices, and (iv) commitment to engage in new forms of collaboration and new types of collaborating partners in a consistent and coherent manner.

In parallel the IAP also is designed to help organisations to identify how its own capacities might be used to strengthen governmental capacity to deal with longer-term threats. In making this analysis, the starting point is an assessment of the dynamics that indicate how the IASC, IASC-CTs/UNCTs and governments interrelate now in terms of longer-term strategy development and how this is likely to change in the future.

The HFP's IAP methodology utilises an action research approach that places partner organisations at the centre of the analytical process, including the identification of interventions to enhance its capacity to meet the challenges of the future. The IAP methodology consists of three distinct phases.<sup>1</sup> The first focuses upon futures capacities assessments, the second upon implementation of mutually agreed recommendations to enhance futures capacities and the third involves monitoring and reviewing the implementation process in order to gain insights about their effectiveness, as part of a more general objective to promote futures capacities throughout the wider humanitarian sector.

Within the IAP, the **Organisation Self-Assessment Tool (OSAT)** and **Futures Groups** form part of the methodology that underscores HFP's broader contribution to the humanitarian sector in general. The former OSAT offers organisations a means to test their *futures* capacities in a substantive though quick manner; and the latter brings together national and regionally-based social and natural scientists to measure UN

1. See: Annex 1

2. See: HFP's Futures Group and Exchange Programme for promoting science-policy dialogue, [www.humanitarianfutures.org/main/projects/current/futuresgroup](http://www.humanitarianfutures.org/main/projects/current/futuresgroup)

humanitarian policies and programmes against *future-oriented* scientific criteria.<sup>2</sup>

## Purpose and scope of this report

- Provide a synthesis of the findings from the HFP's work with the UN as the basis for further dialogue on the progress and challenges related to the UN's current and future priorities for dealing with longer-term humanitarian threats and opportunities.
- Within the context of ongoing initiatives of the Humanitarian Reform agenda - identify opportunities that would strengthened the UN's leadership role to deal with long-term, humanitarian challenges, based upon the results of the dialogue noted above;
- Engage the wider donor community to identify technical cooperation and financing measures they can adopt. These measures would support the UN to enhance its strategic role and leadership capacity for addressing future human vulnerabilities.

This report covers HFP's composite work with the IASC-WG, six IASC/UNCTs and four governments during the period of 2007-2009. The findings are based on the results of the IAP missions and draw upon the individual mission reports, HFP observations and the OSAT findings. Comprehensive reports are available for each of the HFP missions and for the work with the IASC-WG.

The report acknowledges the ongoing progress that has been achieved in recent years under the humanitarian reform agenda from common services and policies on human rights, to HIV/AIDs to gender-based violence and early warning systems to 'clusters' and the establishment of IASC Country Teams.<sup>3</sup> At the same time the report advocates that any capacity enhancement effort needs to take into account the changing nature of the global crisis context in which new crisis drivers and ever more intensive conventional crises are having greater and more extensive impacts around the world. Our aim, then, is for the report to provide useful input to the UN's current, but also its future thinking, on how to build its strategic and operational capacity for addressing long-term humanitarian challenges.

## Summary of HFP Findings

The findings are framed around the HFP's concept for organisational effectiveness in respect to its ability to be anticipatory and adaptive, foster an enabling environment for strategic leadership and knowing how to innovate and collaborate more effectively. We examine these capacity requirements in the context of the UN's leadership role to facilitate solutions to complex global problems – now and in the future. In this regard, HFP's analysis looked at the "triangular relations and dynamic" between the IASC-WG and its UN constituent members, between IASC/UNCTs and the broader UN system, and between the UNCTs and governments.

More specifically, HFP wanted to understand how these different agencies and levels do or do not converge to provide an enabling environment for the UN to adopt and exercise a coherent, forward looking strategic role and what that entails. HFP also looked at how the UN's internal dynamic and structure influences the way it defines its humanitarian role and work at the country level in relation to governments. This focuses on the extent to which the UN's assistance matches capacity to need or demand. Also, the UN's added-value in supporting governments to address humanitarian and vulnerability challenges in the context of their development priorities.

The findings reflect the rapidly changing nature of both the global context and the humanitarian sector and landscape.<sup>4</sup> The findings also take into account that organisational change processes, particularly in a system as large and complex as the UN, take time to embed in organisational strategy, structure, skills, behaviours and culture. Strengthening the UN's capacity to provide strategic leadership for addressing complex challenges is as much about providing incentives and changing attitudes as it is about changing structure, systems and processes. The extent to which the UN can proactively and collectively adjust its own modes of thinking and working will ultimately determine how successfully it supports partner governments to be at the forefront of emerging challenges and changes or whether they will be dragged along in their wake.

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3. Humanitarian Futures Programme, King's College, London, The IASC Working Group in the Context of the Humanitarian Future's Programme's Integrated Action Plan, 2006, p. 5.

4. HFP suggests that at least nine transformational factors will affect humanitarian action over the next decade: [1] growing centrality of humanitarian crises, [ii] changing types, dimensions and dynamics of humanitarian crises, [iii] post-western hegemonic states, [iv] the future role and delivery of aid, [v] the vulnerability perspective, [vi] expanding range of humanitarian actors, [vii] supply versus demand driven response, [viii] professionalism and managerialism, [ix] diverse interpretation of humanitarian principles. Discussion Paper, Commercial and Humanitarian Engagement in Crisis Contexts: Current Trends, Future Drivers, 2010.

## I The IASC-Working Group and futures challenges

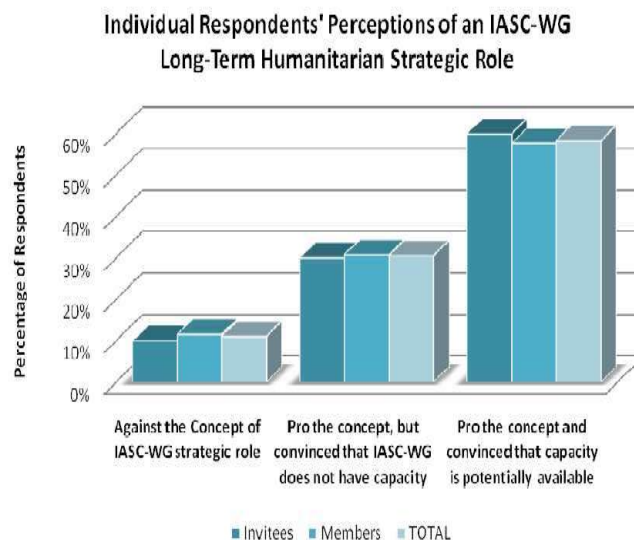
### **Finding [1]: Members of the IASC-WG want the WG to provide leadership for longer term planning for future humanitarian challenges**

There is no doubt that, as a collective, the IASC's capacities have considerable relevance for a wide range of stakeholder groups. Those organisations, both UN and non-UN members, that sit on the IASC represent some of the most highly regarded and experienced humanitarian organisations in the international system. The IASC-WG is looked to as the strategic body that provides leadership for a wide range of policy and strategic issues that require collaboration and coherence for humanitarian action at both the global and in-country levels.

At the same time it is questionable as to whether the IASC-WG's mandate and role extends to assisting its partner organisations to better monitor, analyse and understand the range of complex problems and challenges that they will face in respect to future threats and human vulnerability. Some respondents were of the view that longer-term futures planning does not fit comfortably with the historical context of the IASC, itself and runs contrary to the ethos of many in the humanitarian sector at large.<sup>5</sup> While they thought that prevention and preparedness are increasingly recognised as important, they were also of the view that the humanitarian ethos is inherently reactive which is by definition more pressing and virtually all consuming leaving little space for longer-term strategic thinking or time for addressing longer-term threats. In an era where the importance of prevention and preparedness is gaining momentum, the need for adopting longer term perspectives becomes essential, given that risk reduction strategies require a ten to fifteen year timeframe, at a minimum.<sup>5</sup>

When asked if the IASC as a whole could and/or should play a longer term, strategic role in anticipating future humanitarian

threats and seeking ways to prevent prepare and respond to such threats, HFP findings showed that "there is a general



renewed commitment and desire within the IASC to continue to open up in order to make the IASC more relevant and strategic in its work by focusing on the wider engagement of entities outside the IASC, and by focusing on future vulnerabilities – not just responding to emergencies but also strengthening linkages in humanitarian action i.e. preparedness through to early recovery.<sup>6</sup>

As the above table indicates, 58% of the IASC's members who were interviewed support the idea of the IASC assuming a more strategic role and believe that the capacity is potentially available.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, 31% indicated that the IASC's structure and capacity are not organised to support this role and 11 % felt that such futures oriented work is not a core part of its responsibility. Furthermore, there are capacity and organisational issues that are perceived to constrain the IASC WG's ability to assume a more strategic leadership role.<sup>8</sup>

Making a greater commitment to address longer-term threats could also include having the IASC-WG provide the leadership to address a long-standing gap in respect to the lack of any focal point mechanism in the humanitarian sector which

5. "The International community needs a new vulnerability and protection business model. The new model should have six requirements. The first requirement of this new business model is a comprehensive risk framework. We often find ourselves having to engage in an enterprise risk management with incomplete information about how this will unfold. We must plan to be ready for events for which we cannot plan. The second requirement is to rework the balance between crisis response and the upstream and downstream issues of prevention and recovery. More resources are needed to both reduce risk in the first place and reduce the risk of relapse after a crisis occurs." A New Business Model for Humanitarian Assistance? A Challenge Paper by the World Economic Forum Global Agenda Council on Humanitarian Assistance, 2009.
6. Towards a More Strategic and Relevant IASC: Final Draft, 4<sup>th</sup> November 2008, prepared by UNICEF and ICVA.
7. Thinking strategically, in this context, includes speculation and anticipation of *what might be* in uncertain and complex environments, giving emphasis to cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral analysis that brings in a wide array of expertise in a systematic manner.
8. A total of 36 individuals from 17 IASC member organisations were interviewed. Eleven respondents felt not only that the IASC-WG needed to be more strategic and future-oriented, but also that it needed to develop its own internal capacity. There were at least six ways that were suggested to ensure the latter: [i] establish network planning units of organisations represented on the IASC; [ii] encourage long-term strategic planners from IASC organisations to participate in IASC-WG meetings; [iii] garner the interest of IASC principals to use the IASC, hence the IASC-WG, as a strategic planning instrument; [iv] promote more strategic planning at country levels, that will require the support of the IASC-WG; [v] restructure the role of the IASC Secretariat to provide more strategic direction to the IASC in its policy and advocacy work; and [vi] to establish a futures "check list" to measure IASC-WG policies in terms of their longer-term relevance and sustainability."

provides coherent analyses about the types of future threats for which the humanitarian community should be prepared. This monitoring role could focus not only upon an agreed list of crisis drivers as well as potential or emerging drivers and opportunities. The role could include providing support to IASC members to ascertain the positive or negative impact such future risks and drivers may have upon their programmes and projects.

Despite some progress in 2008 on the part of IASC members to incorporate recommendations to develop a longer-term humanitarian strategic role, these efforts were difficult to sustain.

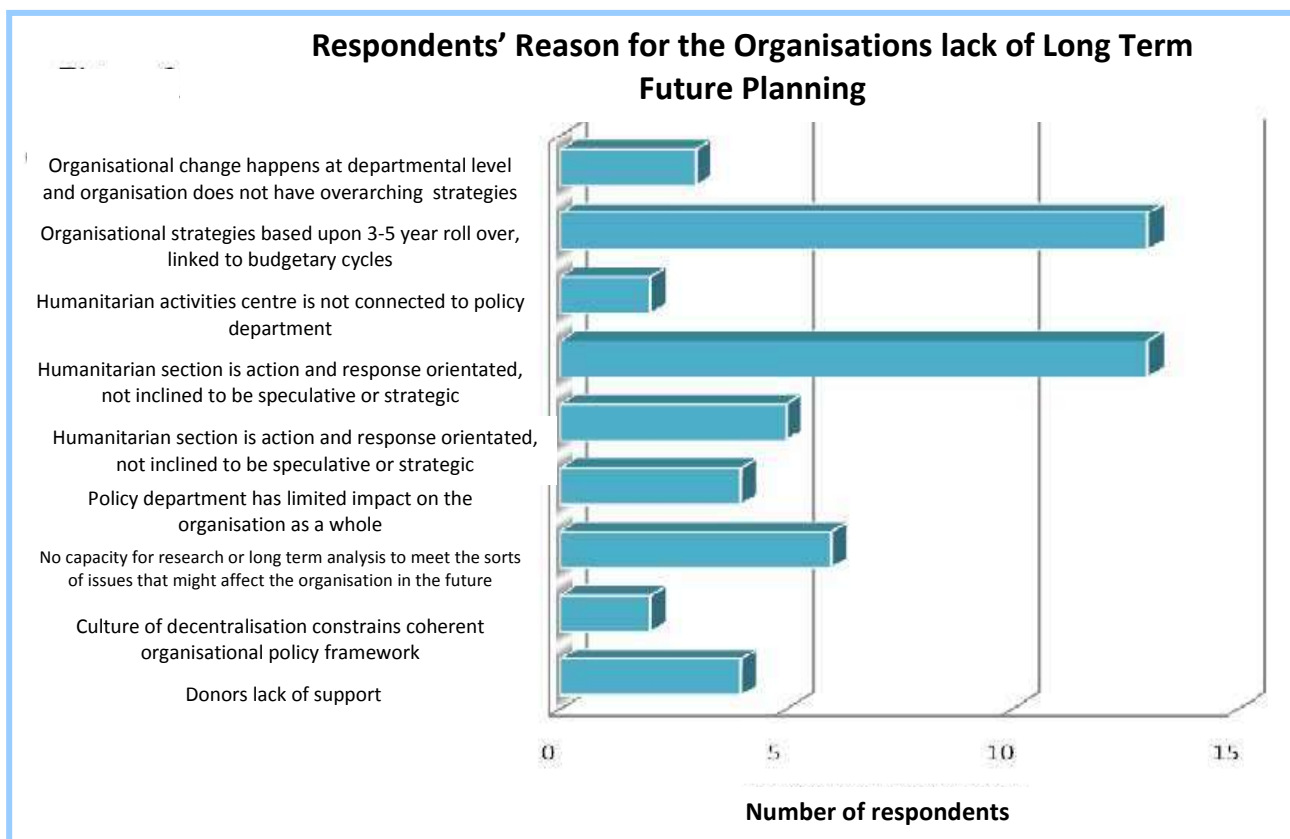
**Finding [2] UN organisations in the IASC-WG need incentives for longer-term planning**

UN organisations in the IASC-WG affirmed that crises events and the operating environments in which they unfold are becoming increasingly more complex and are challenging their capacity to respond.

Nevertheless, UN organisations do not draw upon the expertise within the UN system and external sources to deal in

any systematic way with potential consequences and impacts of plausible future threats.<sup>9</sup> There have been no inter-institutional policies and programmes within the UN’s humanitarian sector to promote strategic planning for longer-term and emerging threats.

The reasons that UN agencies gave for their own organisational lack of longer-term strategic thinking include: [i] organisational change happens at the department level and the organisation does not have an overarching strategy, [ii] organisational strategies based on 3-5 year roll-over, linked to planning cycles, [iii] humanitarian action not connected to policy department, [iv] humanitarian section is action and response oriented, not inclined to be speculative or strategic, [v] organisation has no long-term planning ethos and operates in an essentially ad-hoc manner, [vi] policy department has limited impact upon the operational side of the organisation, [vii] no capacity for research or long-term analysis to meet the sorts of issues that might affect the organisation in the future, [viii] culture of decentralisation constrains coherent organisational policy framework and [ix] donors lack of support.



9. One needs to acknowledge at the same time that the IASC-WG has taken on issues of considerable planning importance through, for example, its Task Force on Climate Change.

10. Four UN organisations believed they had capacities to analyse and prepare for longer-term threats while only 2 IASC interviewees felt similarly capable. At the same time, four other UN organisations accepted that their organisations had no capacity or compelling interest to think either strategically or in the longer-term. In the first category one UN organisation noted that a strategic planning unit had been recently introduced but it was not adequately connected to operational activities.; another UN organisation referred to extensive crisis mapping exercise as a possible indication of futures thinking but that the exercise principally involved present risk; and a third regarded the humanitarian reform agenda as an indication of its own commitment to meet future challenges in a more integrated manner.

The responses suggest that though IASC-WG members are attuned to the changing nature of the crisis context and the importance of longer-term strategic thinking, at the organisational level there is a lack of incentives and other common mechanisms to support that. Longer-term thinking, then, needs to be valued as being relevant to today's planning and operating environment and linked to organisational effectiveness.<sup>10</sup>

***Finding [3]: Stronger vertical and horizontal linkages within and between agencies would support the UN to think and act as a more coherent strategic body to address future humanitarian challenges.***

From the perspective of both relationships and structure, there are significant disjunctions between headquarters, regional and country levels and across the UN system. Individual agencies have promoted innovations and innovative processes – particularly in the logistics sector. Yet, the IASC-WG could do more to utilise the full complement of UN programmes and agencies to enhance its abilities to anticipate potential humanitarian crises, such as the World Meteorology Organization (WMO) and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The wealth of knowledge resources, including information sharing platforms and scientific expertise, embodied in the system overall do not yet come together in a way that provides a unique and robust knowledge and information base on current or future threats. In this context the IASC-WG could more effectively identify, prioritise and scale up knowledge management innovations that would enhance the overall capacity of the humanitarian sector in general, or support UNCTs and hence, governments of vulnerable states.

At the country level, HFP observed a common pattern in respect to an overall lack of engagement between UNCTs and regional and headquarter offices for strategic planning for longer-term threats and challenges. This is exacerbated by limited participation in both internal and external on-line and other specialist networks, which hinders UNCTs' ability to fully utilise expertise across the UN system. Or to improve their capability to analyse and prepare for more unconventional types of crisis agents.

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### ***I UNCTs in a Futures Context***

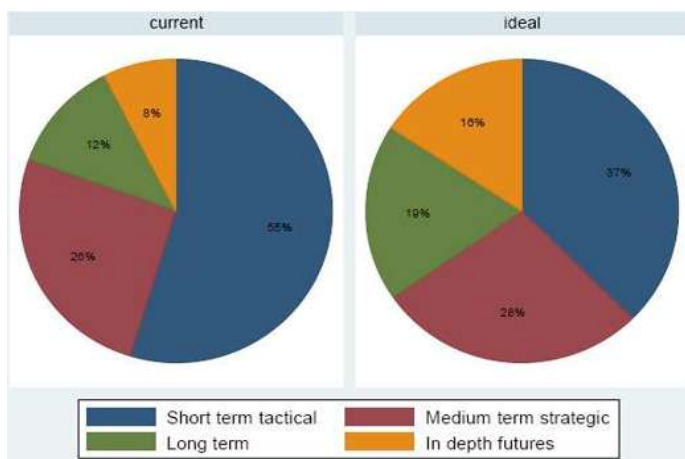
***Finding [4]: Planning frameworks and processes need to give more emphasis to strategic analysis and thinking for both conventional and uncertain risks and threats***

New types of crisis drivers and ever more intensive conventional crises are having greater and more extensive impacts around the world. Recent events in 2010 including the Haiti earthquake and cholera epidemic, the Pakistan floods and Indonesian volcano, earthquake and tsunami all underscore the point that the nature and dynamics of crisis drivers is changing. Thus, reducing the potential impact of new and more complex crisis drivers needs to be given far greater attention which implies that speculating about the future needs to be a valued competency throughout the UN system. Yet, despite the wide array of planning instruments for the UN's humanitarian work, from policy guidance on disaster risk reduction in Common Country Assessment–United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (CCA-UNDAFs), to Consolidated Appeals Process (CAPs), to contingency planning, they do not provide the UNCTs with long-term analyses of what future human vulnerability and humanitarian action might be.

Innovative data monitoring programmes such as UN Global Pulse are emerging. Yet techniques to promote longer-term speculation for issues of uncertainty and complexity, including scenarios and simulation exercises or horizon scanning, as currently being adopted by governments, including the UK's Department for International, are currently not an integral element of the UNCTs' planning processes. As part of the IAP missions, scenarios exercises<sup>11</sup> were undertaken with several of the UNCTs to demonstrate practical approaches to more long-range planning for uncertain threats and risks. In fact, in Tajikistan participants in a 2008 HFP Futures Workshop explored plausible future scenarios related to the political tensions between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and with Uzbekistan to illustrate the trans-national nature of the types of threats facing Tajikistan. The exercise looked at ways that the UN could address preparedness issues at both the regional and country levels. These scenarios, in fact, very closely tracked with the ethnic fighting and violence that occurred in Kyrgyzstan in 2010.

HFP's OSAT results from the six UNCTs show that 27% of organisational time is spent planning, with short-term planning constituting 54% of that time. Respondents would like to decrease short term planning to 37%, while increasing longer-term planning – which only constitutes 7.6% – to around 16%.

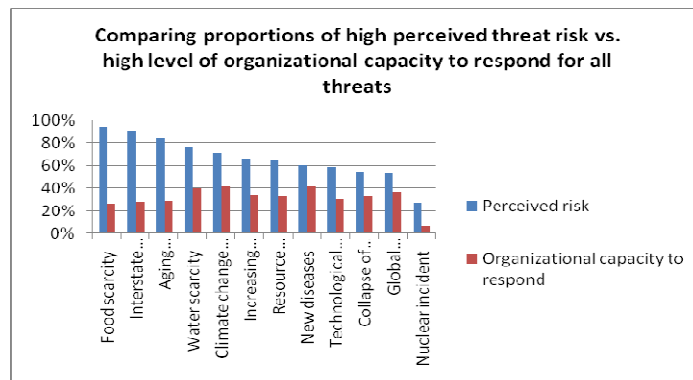
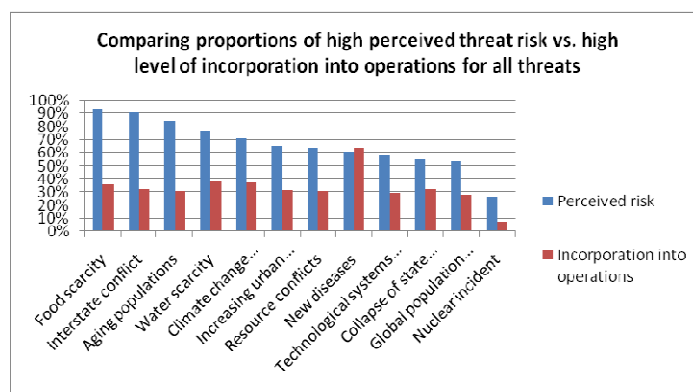
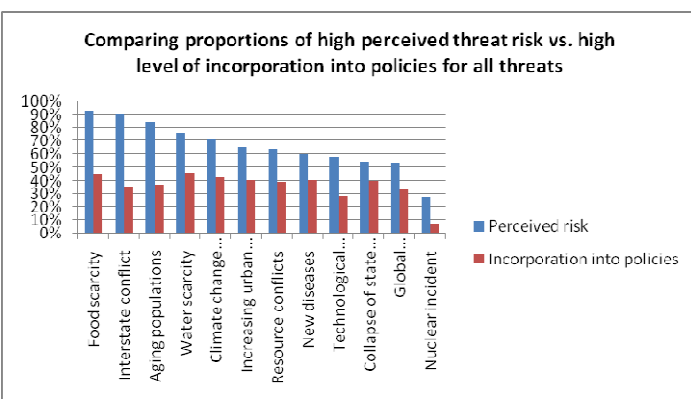
11. Scenarios Thinking: A process for developing challenging, diverse and plausible stories of the future and using them, once developed, to inform strategy. What if? The Art of Scenario Thinking for nonprofits, Diane Scarce, Katherine Fulton and the Global Business Network Community, 2004. P. 90.



Only 38% of respondents suggested that their organization has dedicated staff for identifying future crises and only 50% of respondents felt that increasing their time to do more long-term, strategic planning is achievable, given the way their organisation operates.

Greater use of longer-term planning approaches at different organisational levels could support UNCTs to develop their own capacity for strategic thinking. Similar approaches could also be incorporated into the UN's capacity enhancement work with governments and other key partners to promote more creative thinking and coherent strategy formulation. Yet, for this to occur, UN organisations would need to adopt more vigorous and systematic approaches to knowledge management, foster a culture of risk-taking, and make much better use of the use of available tools, such as scenario development, for generating new thinking and for testing the validity and assumptions that underpin present programmes and projects.<sup>12</sup>

**Finding [5]: Longer term threats deemed to be of high importance need to be incorporated into policies and programmes**



According to the composite data from the six UNCT OSATs, there is a considerable gap between the recognition of potential longer-term risks and their incorporation into policies and operations. Capacity to adapt to perceived risks and threats is the ability to align perceived threats with strategic thinking, programming and operational activities, based on the recognition of the interrelatedness of different inter-sectoral areas and issues.<sup>13</sup>

Respondents ranked capacity to respond to water scarcity, climate change and new diseases at 40%. However, for the three highest perceived risks – food scarcity, interstate conflict and aging populations- they ranked their response capacity in the 20% range. In the absence of undertaking more systematic analysis of longer-term trends and being able to adjust programmes and projects to how these may impact upon organisational policies or programmes, UNCTs run the risk that their internal adaptive and capacity enhancement efforts to respond to perceived threats may not be consistent with and responsive to the environments in which they operate. In this regard, UNCTs face some very fundamental constraints. Restrictive organisational norms for innovation and risk taking and competing priorities were seen as constraints to having the flexibility to revise policies and adjust programmes to respond to longer term crisis drivers. Other restraining factors noted by respondents include the relatively small size of UN

12. Humanitarian Futures Programme, King's College, London, Ecuador Country Mission Report, September 2007, p20-24.

13. Adaptation: the capacity to respond to new situations, innovations and changes in the organisation's environment. In light of the possibility that future humanitarian crises will be marked by rapid change and complexity, the effective humanitarian organisation will have flexibility and fluidity to adjust accordingly.

14 "The situation in Tajikistan is not unusual in terms of the gap that exists between perceived policy frameworks and operations; few organisations with humanitarian roles and responsibilities define "end state" objectives, and for those that do these same objectives are rarely reviewed nor are assumptions that underpin them challenged. This is consistent with other institutions studied by the HFP including donor governments, intergovernmental organisations, NGO consortium and the UNCTs in the Central African Republic, Ecuador and the Philippines.", IAP report, Tajikistan, 2008, p. 12.



offices, the lack of expertise to comprehensively deal with the growing complexity of threats on human vulnerability, and standard operating norms and procedures that hinder rather than foster the revision of strategies and budgets after they have been approved despite changes in the operating environment. The interpretation and use of UN specialised agency mandates is also perceived to inhibit collective action taking to adjust programming and operational and financing frameworks to meet common objectives to changing risks and threats.<sup>14</sup>

**Finding [6]: UNCTs can more effectively access as well as bring together their collaboration and knowledge networks to deal with crises of the future**

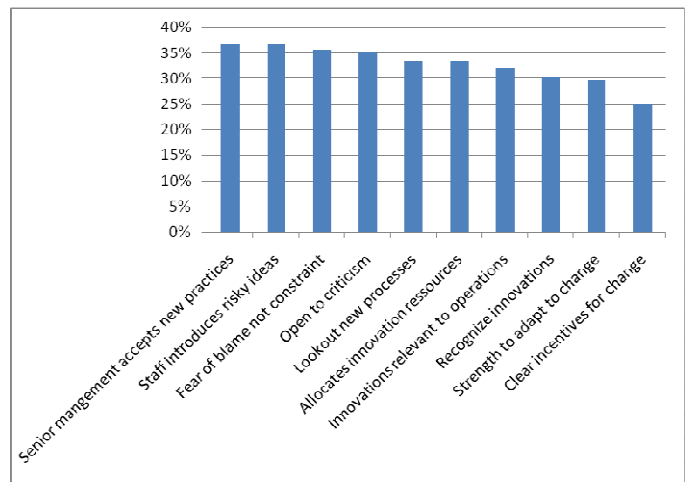
As noted, UNCTs have limited participation in both internal and external on-line networks as well as other specialist networks, for the purpose of strengthening their capacity to analyse and prepare for longer-term or more unconventional types of crisis agents. OSAT data indicates that 63% of respondents have ‘infrequent interaction’ with on-line communities or practice of information exchange portals. Many were cognisant of the self-referential nature of their collaborative relationships and recognised that they need to expand the networks with which they engage but were not all that clear how to pursue that.<sup>15</sup>

The HFP organised Futures Group workshops in five of the six countries - Central African Republic, Comoros, Ecuador, Philippines and Tajikistan. The events included representatives from social and natural sciences to interact with the UN system to practically illustrate how the UN can capitalise on its well-regarded convening role and at the same time expand its own collaborative networks to address longer-term threats. The workshops demonstrated how the UN can bring together as well as better access the resources of diverse external partners (academia, diaspora, scientific, private sector, civil society and donors) to work in new and creative ways to address unconventional or new challenges in a forward-looking manner.

In each country the HFP found a high level of intellectual wealth and capacity that can help UNCTs test out and enhance their strategies and the assumptions that underpin them. Towards that end the HFP recommended the establishment of “Futures Groups” with regular meetings between UNCT

members and external partners on issues of potential future risks. In Venezuela, where opportunities to debate issues of future uncertainty are increasingly restricted, the UN was perceived to have a critical role to promote this form of exchange and information sharing. In the Philippines, the HFP proposed creating an initiative with key UN partners and outside to enhance the UNCTs knowledge, information and programmatic capabilities. HFP considered this would be of benefit to the UN’s Delivering as One Initiative and a relevant way for the UNCT to support the Government of the Philippines.

There is considerable scope and potential for UNCTs to assume a convening role that brings together diverse actors in ways that they don’t traditionally interact to address future



humanitarian challenges. However this means that they would have to bring together internal as well as external resources in a way that positions the UN in a catalytic role and that establishes multi-stakeholder exchange mechanisms and processes that can be sustained. The IASC is well positioned to bring together these resources and to facilitate IASC/UNCTs to recast their convening role.

**Finding [7]: Organisation-wide incentives are needed to promote an environment that fosters entrepreneurship and innovative practices.**

Across the spectrum of UNCTs a relatively consistent view was that the organisational strength does not lie in the realm of innovation.<sup>16</sup> That said, at the individual level staff had good ideas about things that could be done to harness opportunities and to provide creative solutions to developmental and humanitarian challenges. However, individual ideas and

15. Collaboration is cooperative behaviour between two or more entities focused upon achieving a particular objective or set of objectives, while seeking to ensure a mutually beneficial relationship. Collaboration is normally specific to a particular time period, long or short. There are normally seven reasons for collaboration on humanitarian activities: [i] strengthend operational capacities, [ii] improved information and communications, [iii] enhance innovative capacities, [iv] better policy planning, [v] improved strategy formulation, [vi] improved advocacy, [vii] and greater accountability. *Gaining the Future: Collaboration Guidelines for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Organisations*, Humanitarian Futures Programme 2007.

16. Innovation is the capacity to identify and incorporate innovative practices into strategies and operations. The sources of innovation will stem from a wide range of social and natural sciences. The 21<sup>st</sup> century humanitarian actor will have to know how to engage in dialogue with sectors not normally associated with humanitarianism, and will have to prioritise and implement innovations, also relating these to collaborating partners.

motivation will not necessarily flourish without organisational policies or programmes that specifically foster risk-taking, creative thinking and innovation.

The more consistent issue that emerged is the general lack of innovative ethos that constrained new approaches to address potentially new challenges. Some attributed the lack of an innovation ethos to senior management and saw it as a matter of whether or not leadership was interested in innovation. For others, funding was seen as the critical barrier. While UNCTs acknowledged that there is much research conducted at the global level into new technologies and innovation, the benefits did not necessarily translate to the country level.

Closely linked to innovation is the issue of incentives. This issue included the extent to which individuals felt enabled or constrained to take risks within their respective programmatic and organisational contexts. Four consistent findings emerged:

- difficulty of getting approval for reorienting programmes;
- the relatively small size or downsizing of UN offices places demands on staff to juggle the perceived urgent priorities of the “immediate”, leaving little time for creative thinking;
- a perceived gap between international and national staff that discourages the exchange of new ideas and new ways of doing things;<sup>17</sup>
- a lack of organisational mechanisms and procedures to foster, recognise and reward individual, team or inter-agency innovative behaviour and performance.

### **III Governments of crisis prone countries in a futures context**

#### ***Finding [8]: UNCTs need differentiated strategies and approaches between developing and middle-income countries towards ensuring that it adds value to government capacity assets and gaps***

In the three middle income countries where HFP conducted IAP missions (Ecuador, Venezuela, and the Philippines), UN personnel and external partners perceived that the respective governments have adequate preparedness and response

capacity to address known or conventional hazard and crises situations. In fact, were a disaster to occur in Venezuela, UN personnel were of the view that that the Government would be unlikely to seek external support or would be very selective about the assistance it would accept from the UN system.

Host country nationals in Venezuela and Philippines indicated that they would like the UN to help them with their long-term thinking, with policy and strategy formulation and planning. In other words they want the UN system to provide institutional strengthening so they are better equipped to address the complexity of the types of longer-term hazard and vulnerability that they are increasingly facing and for which there are often not clear solutions.

HFP’s analysis suggests that UNCTs’ focus is on providing more traditional humanitarian support for preparedness or post-disaster assistance. The different UN organisations give emphasis to interventions that conform to their own sense of expertise and their organisation’s mandate and responsibilities. This may not necessarily match with host government priorities or capacity assets and gaps.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, it was observed that many aspects of what the UNCTs’ members offered the country at present could be undertaken through other international bodies or even through existing local capacities.

#### ***Finding [9]: More systematic effort is needed to rebalance the trifurcation that separates the UN’s work in response from prevention and development***

All six UNCTs in the analysis have humanitarian work as a core component of their work and portfolio, with the Philippines, Ecuador, Central Africa and Venezuela, working in a wide spectrum of disaster related activities – from preparedness to response, recovery and disaster risk reduction.

Yet, there is still a tendency to frame humanitarian issues in isolation from development challenges and to implement the work as parallel work streams. For instance, there are few linkages between UNCTs humanitarian work and the MDGs and there is little analysis of humanitarian threats in a regional context. Furthermore, UNCTs are challenged as to how to most effectively position and integrate their humanitarian and

17. Humanitarian Futures Programme, King’s College, London, Integrated Action Plan Reports: *Central Africa Republic, August 2007; Ecuador, September 2007; Philippines, December 2007; Tajikistan, November 2008; Venezuela, September 2009; Comoros, October 2009.*

18. “Flexibility and adaptability are essential components of UNDP’s work as countries’ capacities improve. This is significant in the context of UNDP’s work with middle-income countries. A diverse group that is home to half the world’s population, middle income countries are often challenged to make optimal use of their human and financial capital, and to distribute their resources efficiently through sound planning. While many have transitioned beyond direct programme assistance they continue to benefit from access to UNDP’s global network in brokering development partnerships that focus on improving their institutional and policy making capacities.”, *UNDP Annual Report 2008*, Improving Lives Through Capacity Development, p.3.

19. *The Paris Declaration*, March 2005, is an international agreement to which over 100 Ministers, Heads of Agencies and other Senior Officials committed their countries and organisations to increase efforts in harmonisation, alignment and managing aid for results. The *Accra Agenda for Action (AAA)* was drawn up in 2008 and builds on the commitments agreed in the Paris Declaration, Development Co-operation Directorate (OECD-DCD-DAC). The *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters*, UNISDR.

development agendas to align with key international agreements and frameworks such as the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action or with the Hyogo Framework for Action.<sup>19</sup>

At both country and regional levels there is a lack of common mechanisms to identify plausible threats and their causal factors and to adopt approaches that target these inter-relationships. This presents clear disincentives for adopting a more integrated approach to reducing future threats and vulnerability. Rather, it perpetuates the practice of individuals and organisations having a compartmentalised approach to prevention, response, recovery and development. It also poses the risk of UNCT assistance being more supply than demand driven that UN assistance may or may not reflect government priorities or target national risk management capacity gaps.

To some degree UNCTs were taking steps to develop joint programmes to foster greater inter-agency coordination and to strengthen the links between their humanitarian and development portfolios. Yet, HFP did not observe any specific effort by a UNCT to develop a more integrated approach for linking its humanitarian assistance with its development portfolio with an eye to looking at redundancy within their own organisation, and with other UN organisations.

Towards this end the HFP recommended that the IASC-WG establish stronger links with United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) and with United Nations Development Organisation Coordination Office (UNDOCO) as a way to support the IASC and its members, including at the country-level, to be more consistent and proactive in how they integrate their humanitarian and development roles and work.<sup>20</sup>

#### **IV UN leadership and its futures capacity**

With all its potential and resources the UN increasingly finds itself at a crossroads in respect to how to define its humanitarian leadership role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and how to enhance its internal capacity to address longer-term humanitarian challenges in a highly fluid and uncertain global context. Within the humanitarian reform agenda, and based on the HFP's work with the UN, there is ample scope and opportunity for integrating *futures* thinking, issues and measures framed around a common end objective of reducing longer-term threats to human vulnerability. More importantly, at the country level, governments increasingly need and expect the UN to provide leadership to facilitate solutions to address complex global problems – now and in the

future. Yet this will not transpire without a sense of urgency, common purpose, clear change targets, relevant incentives, and new ways of working and engaging.

Towards that end the HFP offers the following eight recommendations as a starting point for what the UN can do to strengthen its own *futures* capacities. The IASC's capacity and resources need to be organised to provide strategic leadership for its members to be able to better monitor, analyse and understand future humanitarian threats. This must be accompanied by institutional support and incentives from across the wider UN system;

- The IASC needs to assume a greater role in promoting vertical linkages between headquarters, regions and country teams in the UN system. This needs to result in strengthening both relationships and systems to enhance coherence and the strategic engagement of different levels of the UN system;
- The IASC needs to advocate for using planning mechanisms that rebalance shorter term planning with longer term analysis. The mechanisms need to foster a mindset for speculation on *what might be* and ensure that across organisations and at different levels thinking about future risks is a shared responsibility. This needs to be accompanied by the necessary incentives as well as reorientation and reprioritising of human and financial resources and reward mechanisms;
- UN Headquarters needs to identify how horizontal linkages between UN agencies can be strengthened to maximise the considerable knowledge base across UN agencies, and make it available for different levels and staff. This should be accompanied by greater investment in technology to develop and support more effective knowledge exchange and communities of practice across the UN system;
- UN Headquarters needs to develop success criteria for having UN analysis and planning give greater priority to the consideration of non-traditional threats as well as conventional threats that are having a more wide-spread impact. These emerging issues also need to be incorporated into policy, programme planning and operations, with relevant incentives and support provided;
- UNCTs in middle income countries must better align their focus and assistance with host-country priorities, in particular focusing on supporting longer term strategy formulation and planning for complex future hazards and vulnerability;

20. Humanitarian Futures Programme, King's College, London, *The IASC Working Group in the Context of the Humanitarian Futures Programme's Integrated Action Plan, Executive Summary*, Geneva & London, 2008, p. 14.

- UNCTs need to frame and conceptualise humanitarian challenges to better reflect and align with their development priorities and mechanisms, including the MDGs. This approach should be intersectoral, incorporate risk scenarios at country and regional level and be integrated into broader, holistic strategies;
- UNCTs, with support from the IASC, need to leverage their profile for neutrality and effective collaboration to broker new forms of exchange and partnership by promoting more regular and systematic cross-sector dialogue with diverse range of actors – including those outside of the traditional humanitarian sector, e.g. diaspora, corporate sector, “non-state actors.”

## Annex 1: IAP Methodology Overview

### Phase 1: Assessment

HFP conducted ten to twelve day field missions with each of the UN Country Teams. HFP worked in close collaboration with the UN Resident Coordinator, resident heads of UNCT agencies, UN programme personnel, IASC country team members, governments and other external partners. Across all the six UNCT missions, four tools were applied:

- [a] the Organizational Self-Assessment Questionnaire (OSAT);<sup>21</sup>
- [b] Key informant interviews with UN Country Team staff and UN agencies and their external partners;<sup>22</sup>
- [c] Futures Group workshops with key scientists, academics and researchers to discuss future crisis threats and drivers;<sup>23</sup>
- [d] Scenarios Development Workshops<sup>24</sup> to test out strategies against future crisis threats.

The assessment tools are constructed around the five capacities the HFP deems essential for organizations to face the future: anticipation, adaptation, innovation, collaboration and strategic leadership. Collectively, the four tools helped the UNCTs assess their own present capacity for integrating futures thinking and measures into current strategy and practice. Phase 1 resulted in a futures-capacity profile for each of the UNCTs and the IASC, with a package of recommendations<sup>25</sup> suggesting specific practical measures that could be undertaken to further enhance their capacity.

### Phase 2: Implementation

HFP worked with the UNCT's to further assess the implications of the recommendations and to identify the specific capacities that the UNCT wanted to strengthen. HFP follow-up missions were made to Tajikistan and the Central African Republic. For example, in Tajikistan the HFP and InSTEDD<sup>26</sup> made a follow-up visit to work with the UNCT and government to look at the potential role of innovation, communication and technology and how it could support the UNCTs work to understand and prepare for the diverse factors impacting on human vulnerability. With the Central African Republic, the HFP's

follow-up visit focused on how to achieve better alignment between the UNCT's various planning instruments, including the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) with emphasis on how they can be more forward-looking and develop a basis for demonstrating clear end-state objectives. In the Comoros, the HFP has been providing support for the establishment of a Regional Futures Group under the auspices of the UNCT.

### Phase 3: Impact evaluation

Impact evaluation is an integrated aspect of the IAP methodology. This consists of an assessment of the observable changes and the UNCTs' ability to more effectively prepare for and respond to future challenges. This phase of the analysis also ensures that the HFP can draw out good practices and experiences which may be of value to the wider humanitarian community. To date, impact evaluations have not been carried out with the UNCTs or the IASC. While the HFP will continue to explore opportunities to undertake such evaluations, this also reflects the limitations of the IAP missions and the complex dynamics between the HFP, the six UNCTs and the IASC, as below:

- All six UNCTs were identified by either OCHA or BCPR. While the HFP made every effort prior to an IAP to ensure that there was a clear understanding on the part of the UN Resident Coordinator for the overall purpose and outcome of the mission, expectations were not always closely aligned;
- Since all the IAP missions were undertaken in close collaboration with the UNCTs our access to governments and external actors was either facilitated or restricted by the discretion of the Resident Coordinator;
- Given the small size of some of the UNCTs and their pressing workloads, we found that their availability to engage with reports and with the follow-up from the IAP missions was limited.

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21. The OSAT is a self-assessment questionnaire that explores respondents' perceptions of their organisation's ability to align anticipated longer-term crisis threats with their strategy making, programming and planning.

22. Key informant interviews are structured conversations that can be administered on a one-to-one basis or as a group discussion. The questions generally link to and are designed to augment the information gathered in the OSAT.

23. One day workshops designed to practically help organisations to understand the context in which future crises may occur and what it means to be a futures sensitive organisation. Futures Group workshops also demonstrate how the UN and Governments can make maximum use of in-country resources to address issues of future uncertainty and complexity by bringing together social and natural scientists, research and academia to inform humanitarian planning and programming

24. One day workshops for UN personnel and key external partners to practically demonstrate how to do long-term forward looking planning exercises and how to integrate those findings into today's programming.

25. Summary reports were prepared for each of the six UNCT IAP Phase I missions and for the work with the IASC.

26. INSTEDD is an organization founded by Google and stands for Innovative Support to Emergencies, Diseases and Disasters, <http://www.instedd.org>



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