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# The Humanitarian- Development Nexus: Opportunities for Canadian Leadership

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## Executive Summary

A prominent feature of recent global policy discussions has been the need to promote closer collaboration between humanitarian and development programming. In adopting the 2016 New York Declaration, states agreed to create greater linkages between humanitarian and development programming to reduce the gap in humanitarian funding, reduce refugees' reliance on international assistance, and mitigate the impact of large refugee movements on host communities. Such approaches are not new, however, and were a prominent feature of responses to refugees in Africa since the 1960s. The evolution of this area of policy and practice holds important lessons for current discussions, including the centrality of solutions for refugees, the need to uphold refugee rights, and the features of past responses that have maximized the benefits of more integrated responses between humanitarian and development actors. Canada's ability to lead in this area will be enhanced if it adopts predictable, multi-year humanitarian financing that includes tolerance for risk and supports innovation, and that supports resilience and capacity building, along with a more prominent emphasis on the role of local, women-led civil society groups in the planning and delivery of humanitarian assistance programs.

## Recommendations

1. Future discussions on the humanitarian-development nexus should be informed by an understanding of the conditions that have historically allowed refugees to contribute to local economies.
2. Future discussions on employing the zonal development approach to hosting refugees should include safeguards for the rights of refugees, including freedom of movement.
3. Future discussions on the humanitarian-development nexus should include a more rigorous understanding of the benefits of similar approaches in contemporary cases, along with an understanding of the factors that explain the support for such initiatives by host states.
4. The drafting of a Global Compact on Refugees by 2018 should be informed by a more detailed understanding of historical and contemporary examples of the humanitarian-

- development nexus and practical examples of innovation and change.
5. The ultimate objective of closer links between development and humanitarian approaches should be the leveraging of solutions for refugees.
  6. To reinforce the benefits of the humanitarian-development nexus, Canada should move to predictable, multi-year humanitarian financing that includes tolerance for risk and supports innovation.
  7. Canada should adopt humanitarian assistance mechanisms capable of supporting immediate responses in emergencies, as well as longer-term resilience programming, while ensuring organizations are able to pivot between activities as the operating context evolves.
  8. Canada, in partnership with INGOs, should promote capacity building for civil society in host states and partnerships as a separate, critical component of humanitarian programs and outputs.
  9. Canada should increase its prioritization of humanitarian programming that is designed in consultation with women and girls, and work in partnership with local, women-led civil society groups. This should include a strict requirement that all humanitarian response programs it supports be underpinned by strong gender analysis and assessed against the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Gender Marker tool.

## Introduction

A prominent theme in global refugee policy discussions over the past year has been the need to promote closer cooperation between development and humanitarian actors. As argued by the UN Secretary-General in his 2016 report, *In Safety and Dignity*, “It is imperative that humanitarian and development actors work together with [refugee] receiving States and identify common outcomes that both can support, including the reduction of dependency on international humanitarian aid over time in favor of more sustainable solutions.

International humanitarian action has to be rapid, agile and effective. At the same time, given the long length of displacement on average, the response will be more sustainable if it builds on national and local systems and incorporates a development approach, even in the early stages of an emergency” (UN Secretary-General 2016, paragraph 78).

The importance of this “humanitarian-development nexus” has similarly been echoed in the UN’s [2030 Sustainable Development Goals](#), the 2016 [World Humanitarian Summit](#), and the 2016 [New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants](#).

The logic of the humanitarian-development nexus is not new. In fact, the benefits of a development approach to the settlement of refugees have been recognized since the 1960s. The prominence of this approach in recent global policy discussions, however, offers an important opportunity to revisit old approaches and recent innovations to expand the scope

of actors that can potentially contribute to protection and solutions for refugees.

The prominence of the humanitarian-development nexus also offers specific opportunities for Canadian leadership. As the current Chair of UNHCR's Executive Committee, Canada is positioned to encourage new areas of innovation within the global refugee regime, while Canada's institutional arrangements, with humanitarian assistance and development programming both under the mandate of Global Affairs Canada, offer specific opportunities for integrated and innovative responses. Moreover, Canada's ongoing [International Assistance Review](#) process provides the opportunity to reinforce the tools that can enhance the synergies between development and humanitarian responses, and serve as a model for other donor countries. Such innovations have the potential to significantly enhance protection and solutions for refugees and support their host communities, while also demonstrating Canada's position as an innovative leader within the global refugee regime.

To this end, this brief outlines the history of the role of development approaches in responding to refugees, especially in Africa, before summarizing the role of the humanitarian-development nexus in recent global policy discussions. The brief then argues for solutions to be the ultimate objective of the humanitarian-development nexus before recommending specific actions from the Government of Canada to maximize the benefits of the humanitarian-development nexus in its programming.

## **The humanitarian-development nexus in Africa: A brief history**

The humanitarian-development nexus was a hallmark of the response of African states to the mass arrival and prolonged presence of refugees in the 1960s (Holborn 1975; and Brooks and El-Ayouty 1970). By 1972, African states hosted just over 1 million refugees. The majority of these refugees did not live in camps, but were integrated into local and national economies through the "zonal development" approach to refugee settlement (Kibreab 1985).

As argued by Kironde (1970, 110), "Zonal development and planning [was] generally accepted [by African states] as the best method of consolidating the economic and social condition of refugee settlements as well as integrating them into the economic and social systems of the country." Kibreab (86) notes that the majority of refugees in Africa were accommodated in local settlements at the end of the 1970s, with more than 90 per cent of refugees living in settlements in many of the largest asylum countries, including Zaire and Tanzania. As part of the refugee settlement approach, refugees were allocated land, granted the right to work, and encouraged to pursue self-reliance through a range of economic activities (Adelman and Sorenson 1994; and Gorman 1993).

The zonal development approach was premised on the understanding that while the mass arrival and prolonged presence of refugees may result in a range of costs for a host state, a development approach to refugees helped leverage a range of opportunities for host communities and host states (Chambers 1986; Jacobsen 2002, 2005; Kibreab 1985; and Landau 2003). While accepting that “the massive influx of refugees in an underdeveloped African country ... represents a heavy burden,” early research on refugees in Africa also found that “the presence of refugees can turn from a burden to a stimulus leading to an economic growth and development” (Kibreab 1985, 119).

Like Kibreab, Jacobsen (2002, 577) recognizes that while refugees may impose a range of burdens on host countries, they also “embody a significant flow of resources in the form of international humanitarian assistance, economic assets and human capital.” She notes that the protracted nature of most refugee situations in Africa means that refugee-related resources are available for extended periods, and may be used to attract development assets to regions that remained otherwise underdeveloped. More generally, she argues that the presence of refugees, even with the associated burdens, can contribute to the process of African state-building by compelling the state to enhance its control over border areas.

Evidence from African cases over the past 45 years illustrate that there are, in fact, three ways that the presence of refugees can have a positive economic impact on the refugee-populated area:

1. As a result of the presence of a large refugee program, additional services, facilities, and opportunities may be available to the local population. Refugee programs create local employment as a wide range of positions need to be filled by international agencies and NGOs. There may also be benefits to the local population as humanitarian agencies invest in more reliable transportation and communication networks, especially by building more permanent roads and bridges.
2. Many refugee operations include specific programs to benefit the local population, both to alleviate local burdens and to foster better relations with the local population. In this way, local water sources, schools, and hospitals may be rehabilitated. It should, however, be emphasized that, given the precarious nature of funding to refugee programs, such activities may be the first to be cut in the event of budget shortfalls.
3. In situations where refugees are allowed to engage in wage-earning employment, they may significantly contribute to the local economy by starting new businesses, mobilizing new trading networks, introducing new forms of innovation, and making a direct contribution to the local economy by creating employment opportunities for refugees and members of the host community. The importance of understanding “[refugee economies](#)” has recently been highlighted in the case of Uganda.

**Recommendation 1:** Future discussions on the humanitarian-development nexus should be informed by an understanding of the conditions that have historically allowed refugees to contribute to local economies.

While the incorporation of refugees into zonal development approaches may contribute to local development and increase the willingness of states and local communities to host refugees, it is also important to consider the range of rights afforded to refugees through such approaches. For example, Tanzania was praised for its response to the hosting of some 300,000 refugees from Rwanda and Burundi in the 1960s and 1970s, and for the offer of naturalization to Rwandan refugees in the early 1980s (Gasarasi 1990; Milner 2009). Despite the scale of this response, Rutinwa (2002) highlights the many limitations placed on the rights of refugees who lived in the settlements, especially limitations on freedom of movement, and the suppression of refugee opposition to these practices. As zonal development approaches are revisited in light of contemporary cases, such as the proposal for a Special Economic zone in Jordan (Betts and Collier 2015), it will be important to balance the benefits of such approaches with the need to safeguard the rights of refugees, as detailed in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

**Recommendation 2:** Future discussions on employing the zonal development approach to hosting refugees should include safeguards for the rights of refugees, including freedom of movement.

It is also important to note other recent cases that included government-supported self-reliance initiatives for refugees. In 1998, UNHCR and Uganda established a program, known as the Ugandan Self-Reliance Strategy, to support both Sudanese refugees and Ugandan IDPs living in Northern Uganda. Likewise, in 2001, UNHCR and Zambia launched the Zambia Initiative to contribute to the food security of Angolan refugee and local Zambian populations in Western Zambia. Notwithstanding a number of concerns raised about these initiatives (Meyer 2006), they were found to effectively demonstrate “the role refugees can play as active agents of development, contributing to the economy and society of the host state” (UNHCR 2006, 136).

**Recommendation 3:** Future discussions on the humanitarian-development nexus should include a more rigorous understanding of the benefits of similar approaches in contemporary cases, along with an understanding of the factors that explain the support for such initiatives by host states.

The willingness of Uganda and Zambia to allow increased self-reliance for refugees was not, however, representative of the position of other host states in Africa, or indeed elsewhere in the global South. In fact, many African states adopted more restrictive policies throughout the 1990s, especially by limiting refugees’ right to work and by requiring the majority of refugees to reside in camps (Milner 2009). By the mid-1990s, 90 per cent of refugees in Africa were hosted in camps.

## The humanitarian-development nexus in recent policy discussions

The large-scale encampment of refugees contributed to the phenomenon of “protracted refugee situations” (Milner and Loescher 2011). By 2008, some two-thirds of the world’s refugees were understood to have been in exile for more than five years, often restricted to closed camps, denied the right to work, and fully reliant on international assistance.

As part of an effort to reverse this trend, UNHCR called for a rediscovery of the humanitarian-development approach. In the run-up to the 2008 High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protracted Refugee Situations, UNHCR issued a [discussion paper](#) with this argument:

The vast majority of the world’s protracted refugee situations are to be found in developing countries, many of which are struggling to meet the basic needs and expectations of their own citizens. Within those countries, moreover, refugees are most frequently to be found in remote and sometimes unstable border areas that have limited economic activity, a weak infrastructure and a low level of development. The arrival and long-term presence of a refugee population can in some respects have a positive impact on such areas: creating new economic opportunities for host country nationals, providing improved community services to local populations, as well as attracting humanitarian, development and private sector resources that might otherwise not be available. (UNHCR 2008, paragraph 11)

This contributed to a move away from the traditional model of requiring refugees to remain in refugee camps, and providing long-term care and maintenance programs to ensure their survival.

The camp-based care and maintenance model was further challenged by two factors. The first is urbanization and the recognition that approximately 60 per cent of refugees globally now live in urban settings, not traditional camps, a shift that brings unique challenges and opportunities. Second, the shift away from an exclusive focus on care and maintenance programs for refugees has also been encouraged by the benefits of innovative responses to displacement in Lebanon and Jordan since 2011 that took an integrated response at a neighborhood level to the needs of refugees and host communities. By supporting both refugees and host communities, actors can go beyond meeting basic needs to ease tensions and contribute to social cohesion and integration.

Arguably the most significant development in the debate, however, came with the adoption of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) by the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015. The Declaration pledged to “leave no one behind” and marked a

significant change in the scope of UN development planning by specifically calling for the inclusion of refugees and migrants in national development planning. Specifically, the Resolution recognized “the positive contribution of migrants for inclusive growth and sustainable development.” (UNGA 2015, paragraph 29) States also pledged to work with the UN to strengthen the resilience of communities hosting refugees, particularly in developing countries.

Building from this opportunity, OCHA, UNHCR, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, and the World Bank outlined the benefits of the humanitarian-development approach in a [December 2015 report](#), published by the Centre for International Cooperation. The report argued that the 2015 Declaration created a normative base for exploring the benefits of the humanitarian-development nexus more fully. The report called for a new framework based on four elements:

1. Joint development-humanitarian assessments and multi-year planning and programming that account not only for the needs of the displaced but also the needs of host states and communities;
2. Localized approaches to humanitarian and development assistance that focus on improving the resilience of host communities while creating incentives for host governments;
3. Flexible, additional multi-year development financing instruments to secure host government support for including displaced populations in national development frameworks; and
4. Implementing the plan through government law and policy, specifically through the provision of mechanisms to ensure the rights of refugees through regularized legal status.

Similar arguments were presented in the context of preparations for the 2015 World Humanitarian Summit. Specifically, the report of the [High Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing](#) highlighted the important role that development actors and approaches can play in shrinking the need for humanitarian financing by promoting greater self-reliance, mobilizing additional funds for humanitarian programs by allowing access to development budgets, and improving the efficiency of humanitarian assistance.

Likewise, the [Report of the UN Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit](#) highlighted the need to “transcend the humanitarian-development divide” by supporting national and local capacities to implement the 2030 Agenda. To this end, the UN Secretary-General called for greater collaboration from the UN’s humanitarian and development agencies. As outlined above, the importance of the humanitarian-development nexus was similarly highlighted in the UN Secretary-General’s report, [In Safety and Dignity](#), ahead of the UN Summit on Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants.

Ultimately, the importance of the humanitarian-development nexus was recognized



by UN Member States in the [New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants](#), adopted on 19 September 2016. Through the New York Declaration, states made the following commitments:

1. We will take measures to provide, on the basis of bilateral, regional and international cooperation, humanitarian financing that is adequate, flexible, predictable and consistent, to enable host countries and communities to respond both to the immediate humanitarian needs and to their longer-term development needs. There is a need to address gaps in humanitarian funding, considering additional resources as appropriate. We look forward to close cooperation in this regard among Member States, United Nations entities and other actors and between the United Nations and international financial institutions such as the World Bank, where appropriate. (UNGA 2016, paragraph 38)
2. We will ensure that all aspects of migration are integrated into global, regional and national sustainable development plans and in humanitarian, peacebuilding and human rights policies and programmes. (UNGA 2016, paragraph 47)
3. We are committed to providing humanitarian assistance to refugees so as to ensure essential support in key life-saving sectors, such as health care, shelter, food, water and sanitation. We commit to supporting host countries and communities in this regard, including by using locally available knowledge and capacities. We will support community-based development programmes that benefit both refugees and host communities. (UNGA 2016, paragraph 80)
4. In order to meet the challenges posed by large movements of refugees, close coordination will be required among a range of humanitarian and development actors. We commit to putting those most affected at the centre of planning and action. Host Governments and communities may need support from relevant United Nations entities, local authorities, international financial institutions, regional development banks, bilateral donors, the private sector and civil society. We strongly encourage joint responses involving all such actors in order to strengthen the nexus between humanitarian and development actors, facilitate cooperation across institutional mandates and, by helping to build self-reliance and resilience, lay a basis for sustainable solutions. In addition to meeting direct humanitarian and development needs, we will work to support environmental, social and infrastructural rehabilitation in areas affected by large movements of refugees. (UNGA 2016, paragraph 85)

Moreover, the humanitarian-development nexus is a prominent feature of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, adopted by Member States as Annex I of the New York Declaration. This framework is intended to guide UNHCR's efforts to draft a new Global Compact on Refugees by 2018.

**Recommendation 4:** The drafting of a Global Compact on Refugees by 2018 should be informed by a more detailed understanding of historical and contemporary examples of the humanitarian-development nexus and practical examples of innovation and change.

## Solutions as the ultimate objective of the humanitarian-development nexus

As illustrated by the details of the New York Declaration, enhanced development-humanitarian cooperation is now seen as playing a potentially transformative role in mitigating the impact of prolonged displacement for the displaced and host communities. While mitigating the impact of prolonged displacement is an important priority, such initiatives are not a substitute for a solution.

The pursuit of durable solutions has been a core function of the global refugee and forced migration regime for more than 65 years. When granting UNHCR its 1950 Statute, the UN General Assembly emphasized the need for UNHCR to assist states to seek “permanent solutions” for refugees, either through their voluntary repatriation or “their assimilation within new national communities.” Despite their centrality, the pursuit of durable solutions remains a key challenge for the international community. For example, UNHCR reports that the duration of a refugee situation has risen from an average of 9 years in 1993 to an average of 20 years today (UNHCR 2016).

This trend underscores the importance of new approaches to *resolving* situations of protracted displacement. The emphasis of recent policy discussions, however, has been primarily on efforts to *mitigate* the consequences of prolonged displacement. For example, while the January 2016 report of the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing calls for closer collaboration between humanitarian and development actors and for the integration of displaced populations into national development plans, these recommendations are focused on the promotion of self-reliance and the mitigation of the impact of prolonged displacement on affected populations and host communities.

While self-reliance may help contribute to durable solutions, it is not a substitute. Instead, self-reliance should be encouraged as means of enhancing conditions for refugees and providing a foundation for the pursuit of durable solutions, regardless of where those solutions may be found.

**Recommendation 5:** The ultimate objective of closer links between development and humanitarian approaches should be the leveraging of solutions for refugees.

## Enhancing the humanitarian-development nexus: Recommendations to Canada

Canada is well-placed to be a leader in promoting innovative responses that build from commitments to the humanitarian-development nexus. Canada is the current Chair of UNHCR's Executive Committee and is one of the top 10 donors to UNHCR. Canada's institutional arrangements, with humanitarian assistance and development programming both under the mandate of Global Affairs Canada, offer specific opportunities for integrated and innovative responses, as illustrated by Canada's experience with a "[whole-of-government approach](#)" in responding to protracted refugee situations.

While Canada can continue to play a leading role in global policy discussions, the ongoing [International Assistance Review](#) process provides the opportunity to reinforce the tools that can enhance the synergies between development and humanitarian responses, thereby augmenting Canada's ability to support implementation and serve as a model for other donor countries. Such innovations have the potential to significantly enhance protection and solutions for refugees, while also demonstrating Canada's position as an innovative leader within the global refugee regime.

While additional resources for humanitarian programming would have significant and diverse benefits, many of the advantages of the humanitarian-development nexus can be realized without adding additional costs and resources. In fact, many of the benefits of the humanitarian-development nexus can be realized through existing budgets, but through programming that is premised on predictable, multi-year humanitarian financing that is willing to support programs that include risk but enable innovation.

**Recommendation 6:** To reinforce the benefits of the humanitarian-development nexus, Canada should move to predictable, multi-year humanitarian financing that includes tolerance for risk and supports innovation.

More specifically, risk-tolerant, multi-year funding would enable Canada to help realize a number of elements of the humanitarian-development nexus.

First, Canada could integrate disaster risk-reduction and resilience into humanitarian assistance. Funding for resilience programming remains under-resourced, often occupying a space between different coordination mechanisms and funding sources. Current programming in crises such as Syria is proving that livelihoods and resilience programming is possible, and crucial, in the midst of a complex crisis. Resilience programming should emphasize approaches that empower women and more effectively reduce inequality between men and women, and between displaced people and host communities. Investments in system-strengthening efforts, particularly those that support local capacity, can help ensure long-term positive impact of life-saving interventions.

**Recommendation 7:** Canada should adopt humanitarian assistance mechanisms capable of supporting immediate responses in emergencies, as well as longer-term resilience programming, while ensuring organizations are able to pivot between activities as the operating context evolves.

Second, Canada should find new ways to help build the capacity of national actors. To encourage the synergies between humanitarian and development approaches, humanitarian programming should reinforce national systems and civil society. Where appropriate and feasible, and in keeping with the existing humanitarian principles of partnership, INGOs may be supported to move beyond direct implementation and work in partnership with local civil society in the affected countries and communities. Working with local, women-led civil society groups – which are both closer to, and more trusted by, communities – is an effective way to help these groups play a greater decision-making role in humanitarian, conflict and peace-related policies and programs.

**Recommendation 8:** Canada, in partnership with INGOs, should promote capacity building for civil society in host states and partnerships as a separate, critical component of humanitarian programs and outputs.

While women, girls, men, and boys are all affected in a crisis, as the result of deep-rooted gender inequalities women and girls face greater obstacles in reaching their potential and leading safe, healthy, and dignified lives. Sixty per cent of all maternal deaths take place in humanitarian settings, and all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls spike during disasters and conflict. At the same time, women play critical roles in emergency situations, clearly shown in the Syria crisis, where they are leading relief and recovery efforts, and taking on increasing responsibilities. Emergencies offer a unique opportunity to support shifts in gender dynamics and to recognize and enhance the agency of women and girls in affected communities.

**Recommendation 9:** Canada should increase its prioritization of humanitarian programming that is designed in consultation with women and girls, and work in partnership with local, women-led civil society groups. This should include a strict requirement that all humanitarian response programs it supports be underpinned by strong gender analysis and assessed against the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Gender Marker tool.

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