Quadrennial Evaluation Synthesis


February 2018
This synthesis is based on the following evaluations:

**Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations**
- Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Response to Typhoon Haiyan (October 2014)
- Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Response to the Crisis in South Sudan (November 2015)
- Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Response to the Crisis in the Central African Republic (April 2016)

**OCHA Evaluations**
- Evaluation of OCHA response to the Syria crisis (March 2016)
- Evaluation of Multi-Year Planning (February 2017)

Reference is also made to the following documents commissioned by OCHA:
- Synthesis of key findings from IAHEs of the international responses to crises in the Philippines (Typhoon Haiyan), South Sudan and the Central African Republic (July 2016)
- Syria Coordinated Accountability and Lesson Learning (CALL): Evaluation Synthesis and Gap Analysis (May 2016)
- Some retrospective comparison is made with the findings summarized in OCHA’s Biennial evaluation report of 2011-2012.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This synthesis was written by James Darcy, independent consultant, and managed by Nicolas Rost, OCHA. Victoria Saiz-Omenaca, Chief a.i., OCHA Evaluation and Oversight Unit, and Kelly David, Chief of SPEGS, provided overall guidance. Georgina Berriman, intern, provided support. Max Miller, intern, was responsible for graphic design and layout.

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors of the synthesis and synthesized evaluations, and do not necessarily reflect those of OCHA.

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Cover Photo: 7 Dec 2014, Borongan City: Three girls standing in front of a destroyed house in the aftermath of Typhoon Hagupit. Seen during the initial damage and needs assessment by OCHA team. Credit: OCHA/May Munoz
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background
This report provides a synthesis of the main findings and lessons arising from evaluations managed by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) – both OCHA-internal evaluations and Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations – during the period 2014-2017. This includes four crisis-specific evaluations of humanitarian responses in the Philippines (Typhoon Haiyan), South Sudan, the Central African Republic and the Syria crisis, together with global evaluations of the use of Common Humanitarian Funds and of multi-year planning. Much of the focus is on Transformative Agenda priorities, but the synthesis also attempts to highlight those findings most relevant to the post-World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) agenda, as well as those relating to OCHA’s own core functions.

The findings from the evaluations converge around the following issues:

Effectiveness of Humanitarian Responses
Overall, the relief components of the responses reviewed are judged to have been largely successful in achieving their objectives. The interventions reviewed in inter-agency evaluations were found to have been overall successful in saving lives and tackling the more acute needs and risks that each crisis created. Indeed, in the South Sudan case, the intervention probably averted famine. The recovery components, by contrast, are found to be much weaker. The evaluations shed useful light on key enabling and disabling factors in the effectiveness of humanitarian responses across different contexts. The conflict-related responses in particular have taken place in highly challenging circumstances, and performance has to be judged accordingly. One overarching challenge in this area lies in assessing the effectiveness of a given intervention, especially when it may have been conducted remotely and with limited oversight. Unclear target setting is one factor in this, as is the over-reliance on output delivery as a measure of effectiveness. But the achievement of objectives is, in any case, highly contingent on changing circumstances in such contexts, particularly with respect to limits on access.

Leadership: the Humanitarian Coordinator, Humanitarian Country Team and Beyond
The rapid deployment of senior leaders has proved its value in the initial phase of the relief response – though short-term deployments are no substitute for sustained leadership in protracted crises or for collective leadership by the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT). In spite of the existence of a Level-3 crisis roster of senior humanitarian coordinators, there remains a global shortage of suitable senior leaders. The evaluations also highlight a significant leadership deficit at levels below the HCT, notably at cluster and inter-cluster levels, and suggest the need both to empower these lower levels of leadership and to hold them better to account. The other main lesson that emerges is the need for senior agency staff to provide leadership that goes beyond their own agency agendas and genuinely supports the collective inter-agency agenda.

Advocacy, Policy, and Humanitarian Diplomacy
The Syria crisis response provides important lessons for OCHA and the wider system concerning humanitarian advocacy and diplomacy. By painstakingly making the case for scaled-up cross-border work to access opposition-held areas, OCHA and the Emergency Relief Coordinator provided much of the basis for the 2014 series of Security Council resolutions that enabled scaled-up operations from neighbouring countries. In particular, resolution 2165 opened up new legal avenues for aid to enter otherwise difficult to reach areas. A crucial part of this was developing the related policy case. The evaluation concludes that OCHA can and should lead
on high-level access negotiations and related strategy – in part because it is not subject to
the same pragmatic constraints as the operational agencies. Syria provides both an important
precedent and a potential template.

Needs assessment and the Humanitarian Programme Cycle
Joint needs assessment emerges as an area of significant progress in humanitarian action. While
it has taken time to develop the level of context-specific detail required (Syria, South Sudan),
more recent results – notably in the form of increasingly detailed Humanitarian Needs Overviews
feeding into revised Humanitarian Response Plans – have been a significant advance on previous
practice. That said, a number of lessons emerge and standard format initial rapid assessments
have variable utility, depending on context. At the operational level, sector-specific assessments
have much more significance than ‘broad-spectrum’ (multi-sector) joint assessments. The
evidence from the evaluations suggests that the function of the different types of assessment
is currently confused, that potential synergies between them are not realised, and that joint
assessments too often do not perform their intended functions. As a result, the Humanitarian
Programme Cycle’s goal of evidence-based strategic planning is not currently being realised to
the extent it should be.

Strategic and Operational Planning
Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) are generally reckoned to be an advance on the previous
Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP). Three main challenges are highlighted in the evaluations.
The first is the commonly reported lack of full ownership of the HRPs even by HCT members.
Individual agency agendas dominate decision making, and there is a lack of collective
accountability for delivering the HRP. The second issue is that the HRP is seen much more as
a fundraising document than as a plan that provides a genuine strategic road map; yet the
larger donors tend not to use it to determine how to allocate funds. The HRP is thus in danger
of being neither an effective fundraising tool nor an effective management or accountability
tool. The third issue concerns the operational level of planning, which is generally judged weak,
too much based on outputs and vague indicators, and providing a limited basis for measuring
progress. That said, the HRP and sector-level plans do provide a necessary means to reconcile
and coordinate existing plans, and to compile and monitor common targets. This provides a
basis for accountability and course correction with respect to the overall response through the
HCT, cluster and inter-cluster mechanisms and otherwise.

Recovery, Resilience and Multi-year Planning
The theme of relatively strong relief responses but much weaker response to more structural
problems recurs throughout the evaluations. It appears that ambition often far outstrips capacity
to deliver in this respect, particularly with regard to pre-existing, chronic problems and service
deficits. Yet these often form part of the ambition of the HRPs and must be judged accordingly.
The Multi-Year Planning evaluation notes that in many fragile and conflict-affected contexts,
development action is under-resourced – while humanitarians find themselves drawn into costly
long-term substitution. To succeed, a multi-year plan needs development action at scale.

Engagement with Government and Civil Society
The nature of engagement that is possible with government and civil society depends greatly
on the crisis context. Yet even in conflict situations, the conclusion from the evaluations is that
more can generally be done on both fronts than is currently acknowledged. The international
humanitarian system provides a potential bridge between national or local capacities and
the resources necessary to mobilise them fully – something that the post-WHS agenda will
increasingly rely on.

**Community Engagement and Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP)**

In the case of Typhoon Haiyan, community engagement was central to the response, and a number of lessons emerge as to how best to engage with communities. The Central African Republic and South Sudan evaluations, by contrast, suggest that community engagement remains a blind spot of the inter-agency system. Rather than being seen as integral to relevant and effective programming, it is often treated as (at best) a secondary aspect of the response and something to be attended to once the programme is established. The difficulty of working in insecure environments does not sufficiently explain the contrast with the Philippines case.

**Coordination Processes and Application of the Level 3 Mechanism**

All of the evaluations tend to the view that coordination processes have been too heavy, slow or cumbersome, particularly at the strategic or HCT level. At the cluster or sector level, heavy demands for information and calls on staff time in attending meetings are highlighted in particular. At least by implication, the benefit provided by these processes was (in many cases) not felt to justify the costs. The Level 3 (L3) mechanism proved its worth as a means of focusing attention on acute situations and mobilising commensurate financial and human resources. Its value in relation to the post-emergency phase and protracted crises is much less clear. Overall, the L3 declaration achieved its principle aim of forcing the pace of the response.

**Information Management**

OCHA’s role in this field is widely acknowledged to be pivotal, though it depends heavily on others to provide accurate and timely information. One of the main challenges is the perceived burden on operational agencies of providing the information requested by OCHA to feed into its information products, the value of which is not always perceived by those same agencies.

**Humanitarian Financing**

The evaluation of the Common Humanitarian Funds (CHFs) concludes that given global humanitarian funding constraints, the focus of CHFs should remain on life-saving humanitarian response, integrating resilience when possible. More robust efforts are needed to refer longer-term projects for development funding, and to enable local NGOs to access available humanitarian funds.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ..........................................................................................................................................................2
Executive Summary ..........................................................................................................................................................3
1. OCHA’s Evaluation Function ........................................................................................................................................7
2. Introduction and Background .....................................................................................................................................7
3. Leadership by the HC, HCT and Beyond ..................................................................................................................10
4. Needs Assessment, Monitoring and the Humanitarian Programme Cycle .............................................................12
5. Joint Strategic and Operational Planning ............................................................................................................15
6. Response Effectiveness and Achievement of HRP Objectives ............................................................................17
7. Recovery, Resilience and Multi-year Planning .....................................................................................................20
8. Engagement with National and Local Government and Civil Society .................................................................22
9. Community Engagement and Accountability to Affected Populations ...............................................................24
10. Coordination Processes and Application of the L3 Mechanism ..............................................................................25
11. Information Management ......................................................................................................................................28
12. Pooled Funding Mechanisms ..................................................................................................................................29
13. Outlook on 2018-2021 ................................................................................................................................................30
Annex: Summaries of the Evaluations .....................................................................................................................................32
   Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Typhoon Haiyan Response (October 2014) ....................................32
   Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Response to the Crisis in South Sudan (November 2015) ................32
   Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Response to the Crisis in the Central African Republic (March 2016) .........................................................................................................................33
   Evaluation of OCHA Response to the Syria Crisis (March 2016) ............................................................................34
   Evaluation of the Common Humanitarian Fund (March 2015) ....................................................................................35
   Evaluation of Multi-Year Planning (February 2017) .....................................................................................................35
List of Acronyms ...........................................................................................................................................................37
1. **OCHA’s Evaluation Function**

1.1 The goal of OCHA’s evaluation function is to help both the organisation and the humanitarian system to better understand their areas of strengths and weakness through structured, objective and pinpointed analysis. Evaluations provide an independent assessment of expected and achieved accomplishments, enhancing accountability and learning. Reflecting its unique mandate as a coordination entity, OCHA conducts evaluations not only to assess the relevance and impact of its coordination activities, but to help coordinate evaluation activity for the entire humanitarian system. Evaluations in OCHA fall into two main categories: internal and external. First, OCHA-internal evaluations include thematic evaluations, humanitarian financing evaluations and emergency response evaluations. Second, OCHA manages system-wide evaluations (Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations), which assess the overall humanitarian response. In support of evaluations, the function also includes the development of evaluation policy, guidance and quality assurance systems. OCHA’s evaluation work is in line with the UN Evaluation Group’s norms and standards, and builds on tools from the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP) and the wider practice of the UN system.

2. **Introduction and Background**

2.1 This report provides a synthesis of the main findings and lessons arising from OCHA-managed evaluations during the period 2014-2017, the same timeframe as OCHA’s 2014-2017 Strategic Framework (including its Strategic Plan and Monitoring and Evaluation Plan). Central to this are the findings from four crisis-specific evaluations of humanitarian responses in the Philippines (Typhoon Haiyan), South Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR) and the Syria crisis. The first three of these are Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations (IAHEs) commissioned as then required under the Level 3 emergency protocols. The Syria crisis evaluation is specifically concerned with OCHA’s activities, but also (in the absence of a Syria IAHE) provides some insights into the system-wide response. The other two evaluations concern the use of Common Humanitarian Funds (CHFs) and multi-year planning. There is limited focus in the material on OCHA’s performance per se, but the synthesis overall focuses on issues of most relevance to OCHA’s mandate.

**Visits by Evaluation Teams:**
- Philippines
- South Sudan (2x)
- CAR (2x)
- DRC
- Somalia (2x)

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[1] ‘Internal evaluations’, in this synthesis, refers to OCHA-commissioned evaluations of OCHA’s work. ‘External evaluations’ are commissioned by entities other than OCHA. For the 2014-2017 timeframe, these are Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations, commissioned by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) but managed by OCHA. Other external evaluations of OCHA, i.e. those commissioned and managed by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) are not included in this synthesis. In the language of the United Nations Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (PPBME rules), what is referred to as ‘internal evaluations’ in this synthesis are ‘self-evaluations’. In the language of the PPBME rules, OIOS evaluations are also ‘internal’ since OIOS is part of the UN Secretariat, see http://undocs.org/ST/SGB/2016/6.


[3] Level 3 emergencies are “major sudden-onset humanitarian crises triggered by natural disasters or conflict which require system-wide mobilization”; see https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/node/2564. IAHE guidance has since changed and IAHEs are now longer automatically triggered for L3 emergencies. The guidelines are available at https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/evaluations/guidance/guidance.

[4] CHFs, as well as Emergency Response Funds (ERFs) are now referred to as country-based pooled funds (CBPFs).
This synthesis distinguishes two main kinds of findings: (i) those relating to crisis responses themselves; and specifically, to the relevance, effectiveness and quality of the UN-coordinated international responses; and (ii) findings concerned with the related inter-agency processes which contributed to the way these responses were informed, planned, resourced, coordinated and reported. With regard to these processes, the same questions arise in each case: what value do the collective processes add, what results from them, who benefits – and at what cost? These processes are a means to an end, not an end in themselves, and their value must be assessed accordingly. Improvement in this area depends on increasing value relative to cost.

The dominant focus in much of the material above is on Transformative Agenda (TA) priorities, reflecting global policy priorities over the period in question. As a result, particular attention is given to questions of leadership, including empowered leadership by Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) under Level 3 protocols; coordination, including the functioning of the clusters; accountability to affected populations (AAP); and the Humanitarian Programme Cycle. The analysis also reflects the core IAHE questions concerning results achieved against Humanitarian Response Plans, the involvement and capacity strengthening of national and local stakeholders, the overall effectiveness of coordination, and the application of Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) core principles and guidance.

[5] For more information on the Transformative Agenda, a package of reforms to the humanitarian coordination system, see https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-transformative-agenda.

[6] Previously called Strategic Response Plans (SRPs). For the sake of clarity, former SRPs are referred to in this report as ‘HRPs’ throughout. The SRP/HRP replaced the earlier Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP).
2.4 While the Transformative Agenda remains relevant, the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) of May 2016 has given rise to the Agenda for Humanity and related initiatives, which together form a global agenda that sets new priorities, involving, inter alia, greater localization of relief efforts, more flexible and innovative approaches to aid financing, a greater focus on prevention and risk mitigation, and greater attention to the way the international system responds to conflict. This synthesis attempts to highlight some of the findings that appear most relevant to this post-WHS agenda. It also attempts to highlight those evaluation findings that relate to OCHA’s core functions: coordination, policy, advocacy, information management and humanitarian financing. A number of common findings emerge but given the relatively small sample of evaluations involved, the generic conclusions presented here should be treated as indicative rather than definitive.

2.5 Most of the crisis-specific evaluation material concerns protracted, conflict-related crises (South Sudan, CAR, Syria) of a kind that accounts for the great majority of international humanitarian action. While the TA focus tended to be on rapid-onset crises and acute-phase response, the WHS agenda puts greater emphasis on protracted crises, the kinds of response (humanitarian, development and other) they may require, and how these types of response are linked. The evaluations suggest there are considerable tensions between the goal of better harmonizing humanitarian and development approaches and the practical reality of achieving this. Overcoming those tensions is the focus of much recent work in the sector, particularly in the light of the post-WHS consensus.

2.6 It is important to remember that, while the concept ‘inter-agency response’ recurs in the evaluations, the reality is that the responses in question constitute a set of distinct organisational responses that have been more or less well harmonised and coordinated. These operational agency responses (UN, Red Cross/Crescent and international NGOs) are themselves the product of individual organisational drivers – including mandates, policies, capacities and agency positioning – as much as they are of any joint planning and response process. These dynamics are analysed only to a limited extent in the evaluations. One feature of the system that does emerge is that national and local NGOs are rarely considered as part of the inter-agency response except as ‘implementing partners’ of the international agencies – and even then, their role is often largely invisible. They currently play only a peripheral role in joint planning and coordination, and this poses an obvious challenge for the WHS localization agenda.

2.7 The evaluations reviewed here contain little analysis of the politically driven actions and decisions (local, national or international) that are so often pivotal in determining humanitarian outcomes. Thus, while the evaluations give a reasonably full picture of the workings of the international aid machinery and its impact on the crisis contexts concerned, they provide only part of the wider picture necessary to understand the humanitarian outcomes in each case. Any analysis of the inter-agency system needs to take this into account and to consider the interplay of political, organisational and other factors in determining outcomes.

2.8 Finally, it should be noted that this synthesis does not attempt to summarize the diverse sector-specific findings from the evaluations. Some areas of significant innovation and learning emerge, notably in the fields of livelihood support and cash transfers. Reference should be made to the individual evaluations for more detail on these topics.

[7] Generally agreed to account for over 80% of humanitarian action by funding.
SYNTHESIZED FINDINGS OF THE EVALUATIONS

This report provides a synthesis of the main findings and lessons arising from evaluations OCHA-managed evaluations during the period 2014-2017. This includes four crisis-specific evaluations of humanitarian responses in the Philippines (Typhoon Haiyan), South Sudan, the Central African Republic and the Syria crisis, together with global evaluations of the use of Common Humanitarian Funds and of multi-year planning. The findings from the evaluations converge around a number of issues, as described in this section.

3. Leadership by the HC, HCT and Beyond

3.1 Leadership was a central concern of the Transformative Agenda, and this focus has resulted in some noticeable improvement in this area. The material also highlights some of the continuing challenges: the limited availability of suitable leaders, the difficulty of maintaining sustained senior leadership within and between multiple protracted crises, weakness of collective leadership, and the need to consider leadership issues at all different levels of the system.

Limited Global Senior Leadership Capacity

3.2 The pool of suitable and available senior leaders for humanitarian response is not a large one. In South Sudan, while a strong Humanitarian Coordinator was already in place when the crisis began, repeated calls for the addition of a dedicated Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator only led to a very belated appointment. In the case of Syria, OCHA and the ERC worked hard to ensure the best humanitarian leadership was deployed to Syria and the region after the L3 declaration, and this was eventually achieved, but it took too long. This was only finally resolved with the recruitment of a Senior HC for Syria in June 2013 at the level of Assistant Secretary-General.

3.3 The Syria CALL evaluation synthesis suggests that the shortage of senior leaders extends also to individual aid agencies, reflecting a more general deficit in human resources with respect to senior managers and senior technical experts experienced in overseeing humanitarian responses. The problem is especially acute when the vacancies are for posts in challenging environments. As the South Sudan IAHE puts it: “The IAHE recognizes the difficulty involved in recruiting humanitarian leaders to be based in provincial centres or remote locations for extended periods, especially when living and working conditions are as challenging as they can be in South Sudan. This shortage of leaders is a global problem in the humanitarian sector.”

3.4 The rapid deployment of senior leaders proved its value in initial relief responses - but short-term deployments bring their own limitations and challenges. The CAR IAHE found that the quick deployment of a Senior HC from the L3 HC Roster had greatly enhanced speed and clarity of decision making. The widespread deployment of very senior agency staff at the outset of the Philippines response provided early clarity of strategic direction.

Identified Good Practice:
Quickly deploying senior humanitarian leaders can make the response more efficient and effective. In CAR, quick deployment of Senior HC from the L3 HC Roster greatly enhanced speed and clarity of decision making. The widespread deployment of very senior agency staff at the outset of the Philippines response provided early clarity of strategic direction.
undermined by a poorly functioning HCT and weak inter-cluster coordination. The IAHE concluded that in a complex emergency and protracted crisis like that in CAR, the value of rapid short-term deployments was ultimately outweighed by the need for sustained senior leadership.

3.5 This conclusion is echoed by the Haiyan evaluation. The widespread deployment of very senior agency staff at the outset of the Philippines response provided early clarity of strategic direction. The result was a rapid, relevant and generally effective initial response. Overall, 462 surge personnel were deployed within three weeks. The second phase response and transition to recovery was less well led, in part because the level of staff seniority could not be maintained, but also because of a lack of effective collaboration and handover between senior international staff, their country teams and national capacities.

3.6 All three IAHEs, in different ways, raise questions about the leadership by the HCT, inter-cluster working groups (ICWGs) and lower levels of coordination, and suggest that greater focus is needed both on empowering these lower levels of leadership and holding them to account. In the case of South Sudan, the IAHE found that beneath the level of the Humanitarian Coordinator and the HCT, there was a “severe deficit in leadership capacity,” especially in key coordination roles in the inter-cluster working group, the clusters and major state-level hubs.

Agency Agendas vs. Collective Leadership

3.7 A common theme of the evaluations is the tension between agency agendas and the collective agenda shared by the HCT and sector coordination bodies. The Haiyan evaluation notes the conflicting pressures and incentives at work within the international humanitarian system. Specifically, the evaluation found that, in a highly visible and significant sudden-onset emergency, the pressure from agency headquarters can distract HCT members from a collective modus operandi and instead pull them in the direction of agency allegiances.

3.8 The Syria evaluation, reviewing the senior leadership provided by the ERC, by the IASC leaders in region and by OCHA, praises the ERC’s leadership efforts in particular. But it found that the ERC struggled at times to bring the agencies with her, and concludes that this “should cause serious reflection within the global humanitarian leadership body, most notably the [...] IASC.” In the countries surrounding Syria, the perceived expansion of OCHA’s role and the IASC in refugee-hosting countries led to disharmony, and the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) contested the role of Humanitarian Coordinators. Establishing a clear and accepted role for a Regional Humanitarian Coordinator (RHC) role had been difficult, though the emergence of the Whole of Syria approach had given greater clarity of purpose to the role.

3.9 A common theme of the evaluations is the conflicting pressures on staff deployed to coordinate sector or cluster activities. In many cases, the staff involved are ‘double-hatted’, continuing to fulfil sector lead roles for the agency that employs them while taking on inter-agency coordination responsibilities. The tensions lie partly in the conflicting time commitments involved, and partly in actual or perceived conflicts of interest for the staff concerned. The Haiyan IAHE notes “On the whole, those clusters with dedicated cluster coordinators (not double-hatting as agency leads) were more effective.” In the case of South Sudan, the evaluation found that at “the national level, as a minimum, clusters require full-time coordinators and co-coordinators and a supporting team of two to three full-time staff members,” but few “achieved anything like this capacity.”

[8] The Whole of Syria approach is a set of coordination processes that aims to harmonize all of the humanitarian work inside Syria, and specifically, to coordinate cross-border work with that undertaken from Damascus.
Leadership in Advocacy and Humanitarian Diplomacy

3.10 The Syria crisis response provides the most significant lessons for OCHA and the wider system on advocacy. The work of OCHA and the ERC in helping secure humanitarian access to civilians in Syria illustrates the value of OCHA’s wider mandate and the continuing significance of UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182. The early diplomatic efforts of the ERC had been largely frustrated, and the OCHA Syria crisis evaluation notes some lack of support for her endeavours by the wider humanitarian community. UN operational agencies were understandably protective of their relationship with the government, on whose consent they relied for access to government-controlled territory; but as a result, they were slow to support the ERC’s efforts to expand access in under-served opposition-held areas.

3.11 The OCHA evaluation concludes that humanitarian access was the area in which OCHA’s leadership had the greatest impact. By painstakingly making the case for scaled-up cross-border work to access opposition-held areas, OCHA and the ERC provided much of the basis for the 2014 series of Security Council resolutions that enabled scaled-up operations from neighbouring countries. A crucial part of this was developing the policy case for applying the principle of arbitrary denial (i.e., that consent for relief operations should not be arbitrarily withheld), through a series of think pieces and expert conferences. The application of Resolution 46/182 and international humanitarian law to the Syria situation was a central part of the analysis. In its advocacy, OCHA combined this analysis with detailed information about needs and the denial of access by the Syrian government to persuade the Security Council to authorize the use of border crossings without the government’s consent. Further, a sizeable and sophisticated operation in Amman, in support of Syria, has produced new and innovative products on humanitarian access and hard-to-reach populations.

3.12 In terms of fundraising for the overall response, OCHA has been innovative and worked hard to support the resources for the overall response in Syria. The first Syria Humanitarian Action Response Plan (SHARP) was produced in 2012. Until 2015, when the evaluation was conducted, it had raised $3.2 billion for response inside Syria. OCHA played a major role in the three Kuwait fundraising conferences, which were particularly successful and raised $7 billion.

3.13 A key lesson from Syria, the evaluation found, is that OCHA can and should lead on high-level access negotiations and strategizing – in part because it is not subject to the same pragmatic constraints as the operational agencies. In that sense, Syria provides both an important precedent and a potential template.

4. Needs Assessment, Monitoring and the Humanitarian Programme Cycle

4.1 The underlying rationale for the HPC – to enable evidence-based strategic and operational decision making - depends to a great extent on the quality and utility of the evidence generated through needs assessment, monitoring and related processes. The overall
direction of travel appears to be positive in this regard, although the evaluation material highlights some important areas of apparent disconnect between the standardised diagnostic processes and the decision making processes they are supposed to inform. It also highlights the considerable transaction costs associated with the HPC processes, and the need to ensure that these are proportionate to the benefits accruing from these joint processes. Too often, these are felt to be onerous commitments that deliver little tangible benefit to the participants.

The Growing Practice of Joint, Multi-sector Needs Assessment

4.2 The multi-year planning (MYP) evaluation notes the very significant investment of time and money in collective needs assessment for humanitarian action. Prompted by demands from donors for better evidenced responses, the production of a Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) at the centre of the joint planning and appeal process is judged to be a significant achievement. Respondents to the evaluation acknowledged that donor pressure for improved needs assessments, outcome-based programming and related initiatives had led to a certain amount of process fatigue; but the overall direction of travel is found to be positive.

4.3 The growing emphasis on joint needs assessment has not always been easy to translate into action. In Syria, it required piecing together a picture of needs in a highly fragmented and hard-to-access context, in which the response was mounted by over 400 agencies from multiple different hubs inside and outside the country. The sharing of information in this context has itself been highly sensitive. Since then, substantial progress in this area has been made under OCHA’s leadership, within the Whole of Syria approach, as evidenced by the 2015 HNO process. The related lessons, including much innovative practice but also many continuing challenges, deserve to be documented as a contribution to thinking and practice in this area, particularly with respect to situations of live conflict and highly restricted access.

4.4 The MYP evaluation found that multi-year planning requires an underpinning analysis that differentiates root causes from short-term needs. Correspondingly, it requires a different needs-assessment process, one that specifically considers needs in phases: short, medium and long-term. The evaluation acknowledges that the change required would be challenging to achieve when collective needs assessment processes are still relatively new. More generally, the evaluation advocates a shift towards risk modelling as a basis for planning.

Application of Specific Approaches to Joint Needs Assessment

4.5 While the overall strengthening of this area of collective practice is generally acknowledged, the crisis-specific evaluations raise questions concerning the specific tools and processes used in joint needs assessment, their fit with planning processes, and their application to particular contexts.

4.6 The Haiyan evaluation finds significant challenges to the prevailing model for response planning and assessment in rapid onset emergencies. The first MIRA exercise,9 though

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9 MIRA stands for Multi Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment, and is part of the suite of IASC-approved tools designed to identify strategic humanitarian priorities during the first weeks following an emergency. For more information on MIRA, see https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/programme-cycle/space/document/multi-sector-initial-rapid-assessment-guidance-revision-july-2015

Identified Good Practice:
The ‘Whole of Syria’ approach was important in bringing together cross-border operations with those within Syria, creating a nationwide picture of needs and response. This underlines the importance of cross-border coordination for regional crises.
considered by some to be too driven by UN agency agendas, was generally considered to be useful in providing reassurance to donors and to field actors that the response was aligned with needs. But the evaluation also found that, due largely to pressures of the planning timetable, “assessments were conducted at too general a level, and too late, to usefully inform operational planning.” In CAR, collective needs assessments using the IASC assessment tools (MIRA and HNO) appear to have been successful overall, although international NGOs were sceptical about the utility of the results, and questions were raised about the quality of the assessments.

4.7 The South Sudan evaluation found that non-IASC approaches to assessment were better adapted to the context. Staff made greater use of existing longitudinal data, particularly relating to food security, against which planning scenarios could be developed. Multiple nutrition surveys combined with crop assessments and routine monitoring provided the basis for a food stress map that the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and others used to prioritize food aid, nutrition programmes and livelihoods interventions.

4.8 The IAHEs found that the quality of local consultation about priority needs was inconsistent. In South Sudan, it was found that agencies did not sufficiently go beyond the level of official local administrators or self-appointed community leaders. Where they did, processes tended to be ‘extractive’ rather than consultative, driven by the need for quantitative data rather than the desire to bring local people into a dialogue on priorities. While considerable efforts at consultation were made in the Philippines, communities saw room for improvement in the transparency and consistency of decisions to target particular groups within a community. However, the evaluation noted success achieved by Communication with Community (CwC) and AAP mechanisms at gathering community-wide feedback and found that the response had paid attention to AAP and CwC.

Challenges and Limitations of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle Approach

4.9 The three IAHEs considered the effectiveness of the HPC approach, and in each case its application in the specific context in question was found to be problematic. Questions arise about its utility in strategic and operational terms, and about the cost of implementing the related processes.

4.10 The Haiyan evaluation raises questions about the utility of the HPC approach even in the kind of rapid-onset crisis context for which it was first designed. It found that the component parts of the HPC were rigorously conducted, under exceptionally tight timeframes, and the related products were of high quality. However, interlocutors questioned their suitability to the realities of a large-scale sudden onset disaster, and whether the significant effort and opportunity cost involved was justified, particularly for the HRP (see below). Ultimately it was not possible to follow the HPC planning sequence: assessment and planning documents were not causally linked.

4.11 In the case of CAR, the HPC process was found to have generated little interest among operational actors, who considered it an inefficient burden. UN actors observed that the HPC was too heavy, created too much work for the clusters and OCHA, and was not ‘field-friendly’. Overall, the evaluation found that the HPC did not contribute tangibly to effectiveness, speed, efficiency, transparency, accountability or inclusiveness. Many felt that the HPC was poorly adapted to CAR and chronic emergencies, that it was headquarters or OCHA-driven, and that it served external audiences more than operational actors.

4.12 In South Sudan, the problem appears to have been more related to implementation and interpretation of the HPC. The IAHE found that while most of the basic steps of the HPC had been carried out, the HCT had not embraced the spirit of the HPC or used it to add
value to the response. The response had followed its own version of the HPC, with only some of its elements conforming to the Transformative Agenda policy documents. Since planning energies seemed to be directed much more towards resource mobilization than operational planning, the logic of the HPC (that plans should be based on evidence, etc.) was not followed through. Similarly, the guidance on locating decision-making in the field, monitoring the impact of humanitarian action and adjusting response programmes was not followed in a systematic way.

Disconnected Monitoring

The specific requirements of donor reporting and fundraising appear to dictate the way in which monitoring is conducted, rather than considerations of management and accountability more generally. The South Sudan IAHE notes that “Monitoring has been a particular weakness of the response, from the cluster level upwards.” While OCHA had generated useful information products following HPC requirements, these were “focused more on fundraising than on exposing problems that need a management response.” This is a common refrain of recent evaluations, suggesting that unless monitoring and other information are driven by demand from within implementing agencies – that it becomes necessary in order to meet an organization’s own standards of success – the problem of disconnect between evidence gathering and decision making will continue.

5. Joint Strategic and Operational Planning

5.1 The quality and utility of joint planning, including the setting of appropriate and realisable objectives for the overall response, is considered in all of the crisis-specific evaluations. These are partly exercises in harmonising individual agency and cluster plans. While the HRPs provide a potential framework for decision making, including donor funding decisions, the evaluations suggest that they play only a limited role in this regard. They do, however, provide a means to reconcile and coordinate existing plans, and (together with operational planning) to monitor and revise sector-specific targets. They also provide a basis for accountability and course correction with respect to the overall response through the HCT, cluster and inter-cluster mechanisms and otherwise. The extent to which they are effectively used in this way varies across different responses.

Setting the Right Strategic Priorities

5.2 Each of the IAHEs considers the relevance and appropriateness of the inter-agency strategic priorities established through the leadership processes and documented in the HRP.10 In the Syria crisis, there were four dominant strategic themes: scaling up the response, gaining access to people in need, dealing with the refugee crisis, and unifying the disparate elements of the humanitarian operation. While the evaluation concludes that these were the appropriate areas of focus, it found that protection of civilians could have received more strategic attention. It also found that weak analysis of needs and lack of contextual understanding hampered the design an effective strategy in the earlier stages of the crisis.

5.3 In the case of the Haiyan response, the evaluation found that initial assistance was appropriately prioritized around key risks. As a result, there was early restoration of water supplies, re-establishment of immunization services, timely distribution of rice seeds enabling local food production, large-scale provision of emergency employment and the development of a differentiated approach to food security. The main strategic gap identified was in transition and recovery. While blanket responses to immediate relief needs were appropriate in the first phase of the response, there was a need for earlier

[10] The question of strategic relevance is not one of the core IAHE questions. This seems to be an important omission.
and more tailored responses to enable households to restore livelihoods quickly. This finding is similar to that in the MYP evaluation, though here the emphasis is on building resilience in protracted crises. A more risk-oriented approach is proposed for such contexts.

5.4 The South Sudan evaluation notes that the prioritization of life-saving activities in 2014 had a positive effect. It also suggests a tension between needs-based analysis and a pragmatic approach to strategy and fundraising. Clusters were encouraged to be as objective as possible in assessing needs; but when it came to finalizing the planning documents, the Humanitarian Coordinator and HCT imposed cuts on some cluster targets to prioritize life-saving sectors and align the plans with what donors would likely accept. Education proposals in particular were severely cut back – contrary (the IAHE found) to the expressed priorities of the local population as well as to the cluster needs analysis.

The Function and Utility of the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP)

5.5 IAHEs raise questions about the utility of the HRP and the related process as currently practiced. The Haiyan evaluation found that the HRP, while appreciated and widely used as a reference by donors, was not used to determine resource allocation to clusters, agencies or projects. Indeed, some 60% of all funding allocated by donors against the Haiyan appeal was already allocated before the HRP was issued – as the urgency of the situation perhaps required. Overall, the report notes that the HRP was less of a planning document, and more of a synthesis combining elements of preliminary assessment, cluster planning and agency programming intentions. This had value, but the report concludes that the standard HRP model is not always applicable in sudden onset emergencies, particularly in middle-income countries with significant response capacity. In contexts like this, the HRP should be flexible, should have a short timeframe, and should anticipate transition to early recovery and local ownership.

5.6 In the case of CAR, strategic planning was identified as an area of particular weakness. The HRP process was felt to have been poorly managed and to have generated confusion. In South Sudan, the main finding was that the plans were written primarily as fundraising documents rather than strategic plans that provide a road map for the response. As a result, it was “easy for the overall logic of the response... to become obscured in the day-to-day business of cluster work.” Rather than being useful management tools for the HCT and clusters, the plans were largely neglected – in part the result of a hurried and non-inclusive consultation process.

5.7 Echoing these concerns, the MYP evaluation found that collective strategies tended to act more as aggregators of multiple actors’ individual contextual analysis and responses plans, as opposed to a basis for decision making. While joint strategies have a clear coordination function, they do not always have a significant impact on the way that agencies programme. Decisions by international NGOs in particular can be disconnected from the HRP process, which is sometimes seen as predominantly a fundraising tool for the UN. INGOs tended to make programming decisions outside the HRP in bilateral talks with donors and through donor-led resilience platforms.

5.8 Several reports highlighted various shortcomings in operational planning, as distinct from strategic planning (though the distinction is not always a clear one). The Haiyan evaluation highlights what it sees as a gap in operational planning at a level below the HRP. Greater
investment at that level would have been “more worthwhile than the effort spent” on developing the HRP. The South Sudan IAHE also highlighted weaknesses at the operational level. Here, planning was based on individual cluster plans, focused on activities and outputs (rather than outcomes), often backed by “vague or optimistic indicators” without a clear monitoring plan. Indicators often consisted of the ‘number of people reached’ by an intervention. A similar concern is raised in the Syria Evaluation Synthesis, which notes as a complicating factor discrepancies between budgeted plans and what was actually deliverable given available funding. It also notes a major related tension between needs-based target-setting in the HRP and capacity-based downward revisions to those targets by the agencies concerned in their operational plans. The basis for both individual agency and collective accountability tended to become obscured in the process.

Strategic Planning and the Common Humanitarian Fund

5.9 The CHF evaluation found that, while there is a close relationship between the CHF and the broader humanitarian planning process in each country, CHFs face significant constraints when it comes to long-term sector planning. CHFs are a humanitarian funding mechanism, and not a strategy setting or planning entity. While it is important for the funds to be involved in planning processes with other donors, shifting the responsibility to CHFs (as happens in some cases) seems inappropriate. There needs to be a strategic framework in place against which CHFs can support prioritized interventions, but CHFs themselves should not be asked to set overall strategic priorities for humanitarian response.

5.10 Many agencies working in contexts of chronic instability want to move from exclusively emergency interventions toward projects that encourage greater resilience and sustainability, but the CHFs’ short funding cycle precludes this. While all the countries reviewed for the CHF evaluation supported projects encouraging resilience, these usually require multi-year support that the CHF is unable to guarantee; thus, agencies may be wary of taking early funding. (On the issues of multi-year funding, see section 11 below).

6. Response Effectiveness and Achievement of HRP Objectives

6.1 The three crisis-specific IAHEs all consider the effectiveness of the inter-agency responses judged against the HRP objectives, and the factors behind success or failure to achieve those objectives. Each evaluation also considers the challenges associated with measuring effectiveness and monitoring progress. In each case, the interventions concerned were found to have been largely successful in saving lives and tackling the more acute needs and risks that each crisis created. Indeed, in the South Sudan case, the intervention probably averted famine. Six out of ten South Sudan states had nutrition survey data for both 2013 and 2014, allowing direct comparison across those years, and evidence suggests that child malnutrition decreased and food security improved during the response period. Significant innovations, particularly in the field of livelihood support and cash distribution, helped ensure that the responses were effective and relevant to affected people’s expressed needs. However, each crisis highlighted the challenges of combining response to short-term needs with effective action to reduce medium and longer-term vulnerability.

The Impact of Context on Effectiveness

6.2 A wide range of contextual factors, including the political and security environment, help determine the effectiveness of a given crisis response. The Philippines represented a relatively favourable context for humanitarian response. Key external success factors included large-scale public sympathy, media coverage, significant diaspora support, long-standing links with important aid donors, and the absence of a high-profile ‘competing’
disaster at that time. Most important of all was the strength of the government’s response combined with affected communities’ own resilience, and the fact that access was not a significant constraint.

6.3 By contrast, CAR and South Sudan were much less favourable response contexts. Both had faced years of political insecurity, had very low development indicators and major governance deficits. Both countries had suffered recurrent crises, particularly of food security. But the L3 emergency declarations in both cases reflected a major escalation of human suffering and risk related to conflict and displacement. While the international humanitarian system was already present and programming in both countries, it struggled in each case to adapt to the new context, the scale of the new demands and the deterioration of the operating environment including problems of aid worker security and lack of access to certain areas. These factors combined had a significant bearing on effectiveness and exposed weaknesses in the inter-agency approach.

6.4 Another L3 situation, the Syria crisis, presented the most complex context for international intervention. In Syria itself, highly restricted access, a result of prevailing insecurity and denial of operating permissions from the relevant authorities, limited both coverage and effectiveness (as well as the ability to measure it). It also left some of the most acutely vulnerable people – notably those in besieged areas – without the assistance they needed. In the neighbouring refugee-receiving countries, the extent of the international role has been determined largely by the capacity of the respective governments, and has been relatively more extensive in Lebanon and Jordan than in Turkey.

6.5 All three IAHEs found that the humanitarian relief response had helped to save many lives and reduce suffering. The Philippines IAHE is generally positive about the effectiveness of the international response to Typhoon Haiyan, judged against the priorities of the HRP. The inter-agency response effectively contributed to emergency needs being met “through a timely and relevant immediate response.” Among the key interventions, the evaluation notes the early pre-deployment of a United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team and effective civil defence support; early restoration of water supplies including in key urban areas; rapid gearing up of health and surveillance services and re-establishment of the immunisation service; and development of a differentiated approach to food security combining cash, food and non-food items distributions relevant to local market conditions. The pre-deployment of the UNDAC team and considerable support from domestic and international militaries, further enabled rapid response and access to remote areas. Large-scale provision of emergency employment also helped to re-establish key public infrastructure, while timely distribution of rice seeds and related inputs enabled local food production to resume quickly and effectively. Among other effective interventions, the evaluation positively highlights the early identification of key protection issues such as loss of legal documentation; and the rapid establishment of temporary learning spaces for girls and boys.

**Identified Good Practice:**
Even after a disaster has struck, a further escalation of the crisis can be prevented: The rapid gearing up of health and surveillance services and re-establishment of the immunisation service helped to avert a public health catastrophe after Typhoon Haiyan.

**Identified Good Practice:**
For rapid-onset crises, a quick response is key: Pre-deployment of the UNDAC team enabled rapid response to remote areas of the Philippines after Typhoon Haiyan.
6.6 In South Sudan, the IAHE found that the inter-agency response, while initially slower than it should have been, had a positive impact on the lives of many affected people, though weaknesses in monitoring and information management made it difficult to determine the results achieved and their impact. The humanitarian response saved lives, prevented the crisis from becoming a major public health catastrophe, and probably averted a famine. Specific areas of impact included stabilizing child malnutrition at pre-crisis levels; bringing a cholera outbreak under control through prompt and effective public health measures; protecting displaced people in UN bases; and “strong, innovative work” on livelihoods.

6.7 Also in South Sudan, working in collaboration with the UN peacekeeping mission, UNMISS, the HCT response reached 100,000 people with life-saving protection in Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites. These achievements were made in a country that is notorious challenging from a logistical point of view and where there were signification security risks. In the livelihoods sector, local seed purchase, agricultural extension and cash-based programming, complemented the role of food aid. The provision of clean water, sanitation, shelter non-food items and health services almost certainly prevented public health disasters in IDP camps and settlements. Concerted action by the WASH Cluster and other clusters in Upper Nile and elsewhere curtailed a cholera outbreak within two months. IPC food security ratings\[11\] showed a marked drop (even allowing for seasonal differences) between June 2014 and December 2014, from 16 to 6 counties at phase 4 (emergency). Strenuous fundraising efforts, led by the HC, raised $1.27 billion in 2014, 70 per cent of the requested funds.

6.8 In CAR, the IAHE found that the response made a major contribution to relieving the immediate crisis, saving many lives, reducing suffering, and preventing much worse outcomes. Yet considered against the more protracted crisis, the response achieved only “modest and partial” results. It was found to have been only moderately successful in providing access to basic services, protection and assistance, and achieved poor results in livelihoods and recovery, while resilience was largely left to development programmes. Overall, the IAHE concludes that, while successful in relief terms, the inter-agency response missed the opportunity to use the great surge of capacity to address CAR’s protracted crisis, and did nothing to prevent worsening aid dependency, an employment boom in the aid sector, and short-termism in national planning.

6.9 The CAR evaluation raises an important question for the sector: to what extent can humanitarian actors and humanitarian modes of operation be expected to address longer-term structural problems, that on the face of it pose more developmental challenges? The trend towards cash and other forms of livelihood support in protracted (multi-year) humanitarian responses increasingly blurs the distinction with more structural welfare and social safety net programmes. Yet in many ways, framing the issues involved as ‘humanitarian’ - and by implication, best solved by humanitarian forms of action – appears misleading. The MYP evaluation suggests risk reduction and resilience as potential bridging concepts between the humanitarian and development models in such contexts, but recognises the discontinuities in current practice. Some of the practical issues arising, including the related questions of finance and governance, are considered in the following sections.

Measuring Effectiveness

6.10 The ambiguities and weaknesses noted above in relation to target setting have a direct bearing on the possibility of measuring the progress and effectiveness of the overall response. Recording of outputs delivered – sometimes without specification of schedules and recipients – often gives a very imperfect basis for determining whether programme and strategic objectives are being achieved. Claims about ‘effect’ depend on assumptions
about the likely effect of a given kind of intervention, and as the evaluations point out, such claims are often questionable. People may be said to have ‘gained access’ to a given service or to have received specified commodities or cash amounts; yet the significance of such interventions in people’s lives may yet remain unclear, especially if outcomes are not monitored. As the South Sudan IAHE found, the “way in which… response plans were constructed and the low level of attention given to monitoring progress against those plans, make it difficult to evaluate… achievement against objectives.”

6.11 The Haiyan IAHE notes the difficulty of gauging the effectiveness of the internationally-supported response in the absence of more data on assistance provided outside of the inter-agency system. The response as coordinated through the UN-led system formed only part of a much larger set of responses to the emergency including that of the government (national and local), the private sector, Filipino and broader Asian civil society and the Filipino diaspora. Attributing particular effects to outside interventions was challenging as a result.

7. Recovery, Resilience and Multi-year Planning

7.1 The relationship between emergency relief and more development-related concerns with recovery and resilience is a subject that recurs throughout the evaluation material. Four years ago, the biennium evaluation report noted the lack of an overall aid coordination framework that integrated all phases of assistance. The more recent evaluations suggest that many of the same challenges persist – although there are some signs of progress. New modes of engagement, including new funding modalities, appear to be called for, and the post-WHS consensus provides an opportunity for a potential step-change in this area.

Relief vs. Recovery

7.2 The theme of relatively strong relief responses but much weaker response to more structural problems recurs throughout the evaluations. It appears that ambition often far outstrips capacity to deliver in this respect, particularly with regard to pre-existing, chronic problems and service deficits. Yet these often form part of the ambition of the HRPs and must be judged accordingly. In the CAR 2015 HRP, for example, one of the four strategic objectives was ‘To facilitate sustainable solutions for displaced individuals and refugees particularly in areas of return or reintegration’. Although relatively well resourced, the response failed to achieve this objective, or indeed to improve the longer-term outlook for affected people. Given the extent and nature of vulnerability in CAR, this is perhaps unsurprising; but the evaluation concludes that opportunities were missed to use greatly increased resources to address CAR’s protracted crisis.

7.3 In the South Sudan case, work to support the resumption of livelihoods and build resilience, was judged essential in helping those affected to regain control over their lives; although the report notes the difficulty of implementing effective livelihoods programmes across “vast rural areas and in the middle of a major conflict.” But lack of clarity on targets and indicators, and the inadequacy of available data, made it impossible to make any definitive judgements about the effectiveness of the response in this regard. The report also notes that the political crisis is taking place in a context shaped by a long-term and deepening socio-economic crisis. It concludes that the response needs to be able to move flexibly between short-term relief interventions and longer-term programmes that boost the natural resilience and self-sufficiency of the South Sudanese people. “Otherwise, there is a danger that external relief will undermine local capacity and perpetuate the cycle of rolling crises associated with poverty and underdevelopment.”
7.4 The Haiyan Humanitarian Response Plan, which covered a 12-month period, envisaged supporting recovery through to ‘sustainability’ and ‘self-sufficiency’, although many argued at the time of drafting that it should have been a six-month document with emphasis on relief and the early end of the recovery spectrum. This tension between an emergency and a recovery focus is evident within the document, and was also reflected in the relationship between the international community and the national government. The transition to recovery was not a smooth one, and the IAHE concludes that the inter-agency response needed to be “better able to adapt and customise its activities to support early recovery.” More tailored responses were needed to enable households to restore livelihoods quickly. The inflexibility of emergency-focused surge deployments contributed to the dominant relief focus, as did the reluctance of some agencies to ask donors’ agreement for emergency funds to be redirected to early recovery.

Multi-year Planning

7.5 The related issue of multi-year planning (MYP) – something that is central to the post-WHS agenda – is the subject of a 2017 evaluation commissioned by OCHA. MYP presents a number of potential advantages, including greater coherence between humanitarian and other response elements. The evaluation looked at a range of multi-year plans, from planning frameworks for a predominantly humanitarian response over multiple-years as well as frameworks that explicitly seek to bridge humanitarian, development and other actors. The focus was on multi-year planning rather than multi-year financing or multi-year programming, although the evaluation sees the three as mutually supportive and combined in the HRP model.

7.6 An aspiration for MYP is that it enhances the likelihood of some responsibilities for service delivery being transferred to national systems, public or private. In situations of conflict, particularly where the host state is a party to the conflict, independent humanitarian action remains essential. Multi-year humanitarian planning does not mean subsuming humanitarian action under a development paradigm, and sometimes an MYP will be a more limited, humanitarian only plan. One-size fits all approaches do not work, and the planning process needs to be tailored to the context.

7.7 The MYP evaluation concludes that multi-year humanitarian planning can be appropriate in many different circumstances and in many different forms, and should always be considered where there is a population that is persistently in need of humanitarian assistance. Importantly the evaluation stresses that the ‘multi-year’ element of MYPs is only one of the elements of the change that is being pushed for in the system. Indeed, it may be one of the least important elements. What really counts are new, substantive ways of working, which look at root causes and collective outcomes, bridging the humanitarian-development gap. MYP is a means to that end.

7.8 The concept of building resilience as a means of addressing vulnerability and risk at the community level has broad buy-in, and has been a significant first step in some countries in developing a multi-year approach. This replaces the traditional humanitarian model of repeated short-term interventions with one in which responses to shocks are built into longer-term programming cycles. Resilience platforms tend to focus on communities, implementing sequenced and coherent interventions with inbuilt crisis modifiers, through which emergency interventions can be triggered to deal with the consequences of short-term shocks.

7.9 Resilience activities are included in the HRP in some contexts, but found outside it in others. The constant need to prioritise scarce humanitarian funding means that short-term work
can displace resilience programmes and other work to tackle longer-term, structural issues. This undermines the combination of acute and chronic needs in one plan, and is a greater problem the longer the planning time-frame. Donors and agencies have sought a way round this by the creation of resilience platforms and other country-level pooled funds, but these can create a barrier to joined-up planning between humanitarian and development actors. New funding modalities would seem to be one of the key requirements to successfully bring together development and humanitarian actors in the most effective way. Other factors are essential, including staff continuity, the way clusters work on this agenda, and whether it is given the leadership it requires.

7.10 The MYP evaluation concludes that in all protracted crises there should be, at the very least, a multi-year high-level strategic plan. A working group consisting of humanitarian and development stakeholders should work to develop further guidance on MYP. The evaluation proposes elements of an ideal model for multi-year planning, including an analytical framework that combines risk and needs assessment; a shared theory of change constructed by humanitarian and development actors; and defined collective outcomes with a related accountability framework.

7.11 The MYP evaluation generally reinforces the case for multi-year funding. The WHS ‘Grand Bargain’ commits donors and aid organizations to “increased multi-year funding to ensure greater predictability and continuity in humanitarian response,” among other commitments. Their willingness to do so in practice has yet to be tested.

8. **Engagement with National and Local Government and Civil Society**

8.1 The nature of engagement that is possible with government and local civil society depends greatly on context. Yet, even in conflict situations where the government is party to the conflict and civil society organisations may be polarised along political lines, the conclusion from the evaluations is that more can generally be done on both fronts than is currently acknowledged. The international humanitarian system provides a potential bridge between civil society and government capacities, and the resources necessary to fully mobilise them. Besides potential concerns about political neutrality, impartiality and independence, the most obvious common challenge is that of finding a way to work effectively with non-system actors who may work in very different ways and be unfamiliar with the workings of the international humanitarian system.

8.2 The way in which humanitarian response is funded has a significant bearing on the options for local engagement. The CHF evaluation notes that UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and WFP adopted the Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers to Implementing Partners (HACT) as a common country-level operational framework for transferring cash to government and non-government implementing partners in order to lessen the burden that the multiplicity of UN procedures and rules creates for its partners. The HACT enables shifting the management approach for cash transfers from a system of rigid project-level controls to a risk management approach derived from system-based assessments.

**Engagement with National and Local Government**

8.3 As might be expected, given government involvement in the conflicts in CAR and South Sudan and pre-existing governance and capacity deficits, it was in the Philippines that the closest level of collaboration was found between the UN-led inter-agency response and the [12] See http://www.agendaforhumanity.org/initiatives/3861
government, at both national and provincial or municipal levels. With regard to civil society, some good practices are noted in each case, but even in the relatively strong civil society context of the Philippines, the level of engagement was less than might be expected.

8.4 Overall, the Haiyan IAHE found that the international community engaged well with the government disaster response and risk reduction systems at the preparedness stage and in the immediate days following the typhoon. However, the magnitude of the disaster and the strength of the inter-agency response overwhelmed some government units, with the result that the international and national coordination mechanisms diverged along separate paths. While some international surge staff did not understand national systems or capacity and instead bypassed them, the evaluation found many examples of excellent cooperation.

8.5 In CAR, the evaluation found that the level of involvement of national and local stakeholders was insufficient. While national and local capacity was initially disabled by the military takeover of Bangui, an Operational Peer Review found the response was not sufficiently aligned with and supportive of the government and other national/local capacities, plans, and responses. Little was done to prepare national leadership and ownership and there was no hand-over strategy. The response also did little to build national emergency response capacity. Some UN actors felt that the government itself failed to take responsibility in this regard.

8.6 The South Sudan IAHE found that the Government did not have the resources or capacity to respond to the crisis without substantial external assistance. There were also long-standing concerns within the donor community about corruption. While noting the additional barriers to collaboration with a government that was a party to the conflict, it found that the response worked effectively with certain ministries including Education and Health.

8.7 The channelling of most aid funds through the UN-led inter-agency response caused resentment within the Government and strained relationships at the highest levels. Overall, however, the evaluation concluded that “a sensible and pragmatic approach” was taken to collaborating with officials where this added value to inter-agency efforts without compromising humanitarian principles.

8.8 The MYP evaluation identifies a number of issues concerning engagement with government on multi-year plans. Some of these relate to differences (and sometimes tensions) between humanitarian and development approaches. Development actors can struggle with humanitarian planning timeframes, which may be considered too short to engage in sustainable development activities with true ownership by the government in question. Political cycles may be relevant here. In any case, multi-year plans should include clearly defined exit strategies for humanitarian action and a realistic, actionable strategy for increasing the role of national actors within the response. Accountability and monitoring frameworks should involve partners (including government) whenever possible.
8.9 One critical issue identified is the extent to which humanitarian actors can work with and through host governments (supported by UN political and development entities) in any given context. An aspiration for MYP is that it enhances the likelihood of some responsibilities for service delivery and protection being transferred to national systems (public or private). Yet, in situations of conflict – particularly where the host state is a party to the conflict – independent humanitarian action is essential, making collaboration and handover more challenging.

Engagement with Civil Society Organisations

8.10 With regard to civil society engagement, the overall picture is one of limited and generally insufficient engagement by international agencies. The Philippines IAHE found limited evidence of effective engagement between the international response and national and local civil society. Efforts were made to engage with national civil society, including early attempts to reach out to national NGOs through appointment of an OCHA-financed national NGO liaison officer and special briefing sessions convened for national NGOs by OCHA. But overall, the inter-agency system struggled to work out a strategy to engage civil society effectively. The IAHE notes that limited capacity of local civil society organizations was a complicating factor in efforts at greater engagement; only a few national NGOs were able to fully participate in the cluster system.

8.11 Overall, the Haiyan IAHE found that national NGOs often felt that they were not trusted (especially in terms of financial management) by international NGOs or UN agencies. There was little evidence of new humanitarian relationships or capacity being built, and more generally, little evidence that the international response contributed to the strengthening national civil society and its role in disaster management.

8.12 In South Sudan, the evaluation found that civil society lacked the capacity to mount a large response, but that national NGOs could have played a greater role than they did (they are reported to have received less than one per cent of overall response funding in 2014). Some of the national NGOs that did have the capacity to respond could offer added value compared with their international counterparts. Although there were strong examples of national and international organizations working in effective partnerships, national NGOs could have been given more support to access response-wide resources, including pooled funding. Positive steps had been taken in 2015 to encourage greater participation.

8.13 In CAR, few national civil society organisations participated in the response. A minority received funding through the CHF, a few participated in need assessments or cluster meetings, and two participated in HCT meetings led by the Humanitarian Coordinator. Some national NGOs had (wrongly) understood that they could only act as implementing partners, only accessing CHF funds if they were managed by INGOs.

9. Community Engagement and Accountability to Affected Populations

9.1 The 2011-12 Biennium Report noted that meaningful engagement with disaster-affected people “remains a challenge.” The response to the Haiti earthquake, in particular, was hindered by the absence of genuine two-way communication. By contrast, the Haiyan response IAHE demonstrated that community engagement was clearly given priority in the Philippines case. However, the relative lack of consultation and engagement with affected people in CAR and South Sudan created “the potential for frustration, fraud and violence” (CAR), and affected the relevance and sustainability of programmes (South Sudan).
9.2 The Philippines IAHE found high levels of attention to accountability among agencies, with multiple communication channels, including community committees, listening exercises, hotlines, monitoring processes, complaints boxes, specific outreach projects such as radio programmes providing information, as well as radio or text channels. Consultation processes took gender differences and other community dynamics into account, with separate means for men, women, older people and children to input. Somewhat late in the response, systematic OCHA-coordinated community feedback processes were initiated, and these provided non-agency specific mechanisms to gather community feedback on conditions and assistance, which was then analysed and fed back to the relevant agencies, clusters and, if necessary, the HCT for further action and follow-up. The IAHE found evidence that this feedback did influence the activities of agencies and clusters. It recommended an earlier start to Accountability to Affected People (AAP) efforts to enable communities to participate in response design, and more consistent feedback to communities on the response to issues raised by those communities.

9.3 In CAR, the evaluation found that community engagement and AAP was “highly unsatisfactory” and that AAP in particular was “poorly applied.” Here and in South Sudan, the IAHEs found that there was limited awareness of AAP as an IASC policy priority and of related policy guidance documents. In South Sudan, the Humanitarian Coordinator and the HCT were found to have provided little leadership on AAP and a number of informants felt that it was not a priority during the emergency, but was more appropriate for later in the response or during the learning and evaluation phase. Although there were examples of excellent practices being implemented by some agencies, these depended on the interest of the relevant managers. Overall, the South Sudan IAHE concluded that affected people had not been consistently involved in planning, implementation and decision-making, and that this had impacted the relevance of programmes, as well as long-term sustainability. Greater and more consistent attention to AAP could improve the quality of the future response.

10. Coordination Processes and Application of the L3 Mechanism

10.1 Each of the IAHEs deals in some depth with the issues of coordination and collaboration at strategic, sector/cluster and programmatic levels. The question of how coordination mechanisms ensured effective coverage (or did not) is one recurrent theme, as is the balance between strategic and operational coordination. Adequate staff resources and active agency participation emerge as two key variables in determining the effectiveness of the clusters in particular. More generally, organisational leadership and accountability for the joint response and its component parts (starting with the HCT) emerge as the essential bedrock for effective coordination.

General Coordination Issues

10.2 The Haiyan IAHE notes the particular challenges of coordinating activities across three regions and five main coordination hubs with a large range of active responders including government, private sector and charitable foundations. Strikingly, the IAHE estimates that at least 84 per cent of the total response “did not flow through the inter-agency coordinated systems.” The issue of coordination with bodies outside the UN-led system (and the HRP) assumes particular significance in this context.

10.3 In general, the Philippines evaluation found that coordination mechanisms were well resourced and rapidly established, and that the cluster system functioned as planned (although complicated by running in parallel to the government’s own system). Excellent
civil-military coordination had greatly assisted the early stage of the response. The IAHE found no evidence of serious coverage gaps; although there was some concentration of assistance around coordination hubs and signs that the response was slow to adapt to new information on gaps. Coordination processes themselves were resource-intensive and those that included demands for data provision for information products were viewed as “heavy.” The mechanisms also struggled to deal with the range of organisations working in the Philippines outside of the HRP. The IAHE found that “lighter coordination mechanisms were most effective.”

10.4 In South Sudan, much of the coordination activity took place at the Juba level, with systems appearing increasingly ad hoc and informal the further away they are from the capital and state capitals. In 2014, OCHA’s footprint was extremely light in opposition-held areas, where much of the response was taking place, and only improved slowly in 2015. Coverage was generally good in accessible locations and poor in remote locations. In CAR, the HCT-led coordination model was questioned and its application widely criticized, especially by international NGOs. While the coordination of strategy in the HCT was considered weak overall, operational coordination, efforts to, was mostly effective in avoiding gaps and duplications in assistance. The evaluation concluded that coordination was an important factor in the effectiveness of the international response.

10.5 On the relationship and accountabilities between the HCT, inter-cluster working group and clusters, the South Sudan report found that there was too much overlap between the functioning of the ICWG and the HCT and that leadership responsibilities became diluted between the various coordination bodies. Greater focus was needed on mandates and accountability. In CAR, respondents highlighted weaknesses in inter-cluster coordination, which did not support HCT with strategic guidance or allow for integrated approaches across clusters. An Operational Peer Review (OPR) had observed that weaknesses in inter-cluster coordination led to a proliferation of bilateral operational meetings. Evidently the balance and relationship between HCT, inter-cluster mechanisms and clusters needs careful attention, to avoid duplication and proliferation of meetings, but also to ensure mutual accountability.

10.6 In Syria, OCHA played as close to a normal role as it was able, given the constraints imposed by the context, establishing an inter-sector role and providing support to the sectors. This has included significant information management support (based out of Amman), particularly in relation to needs assessment and analysis; and contribution to the overall strategic planning process. The Whole of Syria process, which helped knit together the response inside Syria between Damascus and the various external hubs, was facilitated by OCHA with considerable success – although some respondents saw OCHA as more focused on Damascus-centred coordination.

10.7 In countries neighbouring Syria, considerable confusion existed over the role of OCHA – and indeed of the HCT and other IASC coordination mechanisms. Much of this related to the lead role of UNHCR with regard to the refugee caseload around which most of the response has been based. In Turkey, OCHA’s primary role has been in relation to the cross-border response, particularly since the UN scaled up its own operations following the 2014 enabling resolutions of the Security Council. A history of mistrust has complicated relations between the UN and NGOs, whose own operations both pre-dated those of the UN and are considerably larger in scale. Though tensions remain, OCHA and the Deputy RHC deserve credit for bringing these response communities closer together.

Cluster Coordination

10.8 The Haiyan evaluation notes two particular challenges to sector-level coordination and the
effective functioning of the clusters. The first is that agencies’ own agendas sometimes made it hard to form a common cluster approach. The second is the burden of participation: agencies found coordination mechanisms to be time-consuming in their demands for information and for participation in frequent meetings. That said, the evaluation concludes that coordination processes managed by staff experienced in coordination did improve connectedness and coverage. On the whole, those clusters with dedicated cluster coordinators (not ‘double-hatting’ as agency staff) were more effective, as were those clusters that had pre-established relationships with government.

10.9 Each of the IAHEs considers the question of resourcing in relation to cluster coordination. In the case of the Haiyan response, the evaluation found that most of the international clusters were well resourced, especially in the initial surge, with national cluster coordinators, information management officers, as well as a number of regional and sub-regional coordination staff. In South Sudan, by contrast, the evaluation found that in 2014, the clusters did not have the resources to move beyond their information sharing duties and address issues such as coverage and quality. The global crisis in human resources for emergencies meant there were too many staffing gaps. Overall, the South Sudan evaluation concluded that clusters lacked the human resource capacity to address important areas of their mandate, such as monitoring, quality control and avoiding gaps in services.

10.10 In CAR, the evaluation reports that UN and national actors felt cluster coordination was effective, but the cluster system was strongly criticized by international NGOs. The Operational Peer Review had reported that clusters held too many meetings which absorbed too much capacity and raised questions about effective leadership but that they had been strengthened and streamlined under the L3 protocol. Operational actors also felt there were too many clusters.

10.11 Two common lessons appear to emerge. The first is that only if clusters are properly resourced and led, with a clearly defined remit, they are likely to fulfil their core functions concerning quality and coverage across the sectoral response. The second is that active participation by agencies depends on the perceived benefit of participation relative to the costs of doing so, particularly in terms of staff time.

The Level 3 System-wide Emergency Mechanism

10.12 Typhoon Haiyan was the first large-scale sudden onset disaster since the L3 protocols of the Transformative Agenda were developed, the first time that an L3 emergency has been deactivated, and the first time that a Strategic Response Plan has been shortened by three months from the original planned period. The Haiyan IAHE reports the view expressed by many observers in the Philippines, “that the L3 status created its own momentum: an international surge that to some extent overwhelmed national systems... followed by a sudden and somewhat disorderly closure and transition”. While the surge displaced existing capacity and created a dip as surge deployments ended, the mechanism certainly allowed for a well-resourced relief effort.

10.13 The application of the L3 mechanism was judged “highly effective” in CAR, and was seen by many as the key factor of success for the relief effort. The L3 had a large positive impact on mobilizing resources for

**Identified Good Practice:**

The L3 mechanism focused attention on acute situations and helped mobilise funding. The declaration of a Level-3 crisis in CAR had a large positive impact on mobilising resources for a much scaled up response, and prompted the IASC processes to identify and address capacity gaps.
a much scaled up response, and prompted the IASC processes to identify and address capacity gaps. In South Sudan, the HC’s request for L3 activation was judged timely and courageous by the IAHE, given the uncertain trajectory of the crisis. The impact of L3 status was largely confined to the higher profile it afforded the crisis and its fundraising power. According to the HC and other senior officials, its main utility was to support fundraising efforts, which were very successful. Other aspects of the L3 designation had much less force. The evaluation concluded that continual extensions of L3 status beyond the original timeframe were likely to weaken its impact.

10.14 Related to the L3 mechanism, the Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism (IARRM) was found to bring real benefit – although resources are limited and the mechanism cannot be a solution to the global crisis in human resources for humanitarian action. The South Sudan evaluation concludes that addressing this fundamental problem “should become a key priority for the IASC” and that the humanitarian sector “cannot cope with any more guidance on policy and practice” given that the necessary staff are not there to implement it.

11. Information Management

11.1 The 2011-2012 Biennium evaluation report noted that OCHA’s efforts during the period under review to set up information management systems had had limited impact at the country level, mainly due to weak information management capacities within the clusters. The evaluations considered in the current synthesis suggest that considerable progress has been made in this area, particularly in relation to needs analysis, though challenges remain.

11.2 One of the greatest challenges, as noted in section 3 above, concerns the perceived burden on operational agencies of providing the information requested by OCHA to feed into its various information products. OCHA staff were themselves under considerable pressure from headquarters in this regard.

11.3 Overall, the Syria evaluation found that information management had been one of OCHA’s key contributions to the response in Syria itself, and had been central to securing Security Council resolutions on humanitarian access. Maps and graphics helped make the case in a way that reports may not have done. One major issue concerned the limited utility of traditional IM tools and instruments that had not been designed for the specific nature of the Syria context. OCHA has led a process of refinement and development of the tools in question, to allow a much more detailed and nuanced picture of needs and of the overall response in Syria. This is work in progress and information remains uncertain in a number of respects; but there is a great deal of generic value to be learned from this process of refinement. The evaluation recommends that OCHA capture the innovative IM work from the Syria crisis and consider its applicability to other conflict contexts. It also recommends focusing less on static products that are quickly outdated, more on networked products using social media and new technologies.

11.4 As in most conflicts, getting good, timely information in the Syria context proved challenging. In South Sudan, as noted in section 3, monitoring was noted as a particular weakness, from
the cluster level upwards. The OCHA Information Management Unit has generated useful information products following HPC requirements, but these were focused more on fundraising than on exposing problems that needed addressing. In CAR, operational actors also highlighted weaknesses in information management. Here again, OCHA produced standard information products to support coordination, although it was not felt to be proactive about dissemination, and information flows were widely felt to be one-way.

12. **Pooled Funding Mechanisms**

12.1 The 2011-2012 OCHA Biennial evaluation report includes a synthesis of findings from evaluations of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), of Common Humanitarian Funds (CHFs) and Emergency Response Funds (ERFs). The use of CHFs and ERFs was found to have significantly increased humanitarian funding and the number of countries covered, and had contributed to more collaborative and inclusive working practices. It found evidence that pooled funds have contributed to strengthening the HC’s leadership, enhancing the coordination role of the cluster system, and building partnerships. The CHF and ERF funds were increasingly being asked to fund preparedness, resilience, transition or recovery projects, but “current funding levels are generally insufficient for anything other than clear humanitarian purposes.” Limited country-level monitoring and evaluation were found to be significant weakness of the country-based pooled funds.

12.2 Of the more recent evaluations whose findings are summarized here, the Syria evaluation noted the significance of CERF in funding the Syria response. In 2015, the Syria crisis was the largest for CERF allocations, as it was in 2013. Though CERF funding represented only 1.5 per cent of the total humanitarian financing raised for the Syria crisis, the evaluation found that its significance should be judged as much in terms of its strategic contribution as its actual financial impact.

12.3 In addition to the CERF funding, OCHA has managed a number of humanitarian pooled funds in the Syria crisis. These started as a single, regional Emergency Response Fund, managed by the RHC; this fund was later (2014) split into four separate, country-based funds. An NGO-commissioned evaluation of the ERFs concluded that the overall experience had been a positive one, and that the fund had filled critical gaps. ERFs were particularly useful for hard-to-fund activities, and as a critical source of funding for NGOs, particularly local NGOs. The NGO evaluation found that the main constraints were complicated process and the time taken to secure and disburse funding.

**Strengths and Weaknesses of the Common Humanitarian Fund Model**

12.4 The 2015 evaluation of the CHF mechanism, reviewing five country cases in which the mechanism has been used in protracted emergency responses, considers the progress made since the 2011 evaluation of the CHF. It notes that, besides its intrinsic value, the CHF model was created as part of an agenda to enhance leadership and strengthen coordination. Its

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Identified Good Practice:

OCHA’s financing instruments performed well in the Syria humanitarian crisis. CERF had released almost $200 million by early 2015, supporting key moments such as the L3 activation or filling gaps through its underfunded window. This indicates that pooled funds, when strategically used, can make important contributions even to large-scale humanitarian crises.

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value lies in its ability to provide un-earmarked funding in response to priority humanitarian needs through joint planning and an inclusive and field-driven decision-making process. In this respect, it is judged largely successful, but some major challenges are identified.

12.5 The reduced size of CHFs has prevented the CHF mechanism from performing as foreseen and covering many urgent programming needs and critical gaps as anticipated. Across the five countries visited by the evaluation team, CHF allocations on average represented 10.8 per cent of total humanitarian funding received up to 2013, but this reduced to 6.6 per cent in 2014. This reduction in income has resulted in a reduction in amounts allocated and in the number of projects approved. With the exception of South Sudan, “CHFs no longer have the critical mass to significantly influence coverage of identified humanitarian needs.” Given the ambition as part of the WHS agenda and the ‘Grand Bargain’ to increase the overall proportion of humanitarian funding going through country-based pooled funds, the recent CHF trends present a particular challenge in this regard.

12.6 Diversification of funding sources for CHFs presents another challenge. While the donor base varies from country to country, the CHFs are heavily reliant on a small number of donors (notably the UK) for most of their funding, making them vulnerable to any shifts in donor strategy. More importantly, the evaluation found a need for better coordination of funding on the part of all the relevant donor institutions.

12.7 The CHF follows a time- and process-heavy approach particularly for standard allocations where the process can take between five and seven months. While the approach is designed to enhance openness and inclusivity, stakeholders express frustration that often by the time projects are approved and funds available, original needs estimates are no longer relevant. This issue remains the biggest challenge to resolve at field level, and constitutes a significant threat to the CHFs’ existence and relevance, as other bilateral funding windows can be considerably more responsive. The reserve envelope, generally set at about 20 per cent of the annual funds, can be significantly quicker to allocate, but is relatively small when set against the overall scale of need. Consideration at country level must be given to increasing this percentage as necessary.

12.8 One key challenge relates to the limited ability of national NGOs to meet current CHF criteria. The percentage of CHF funding going directly to national NGOs dropped from 15 per cent in 2011 to just 10 per cent in 2014. In light of the post-WHS agenda, this is of particular concern.

12.9 The CHF evaluation concludes that given humanitarian funding constraints, the focus of CHFs should remain on life-saving humanitarian response, when feasible integrating resilience. More robust efforts are needed to refer longer-term projects for development or multi-year funding.

13. Outlook on 2018-2021

13.1 OCHA’s 2018-2021 Monitoring and Evaluation Plan, which is part of its Planning Framework, sets out the proposed evaluations over the course of the next four years. OCHA will initiate four evaluations and reviews: Two thematic evaluations (in 2019 and 2021), one emergency response evaluation (2020), and a strategic plan mid-term review in 2019 focusing on progress against the strategic and management objectives. In addition, an evaluation of OCHA’s duty of care to its personnel will be finalized in 2018. The evaluation topics for

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[14] By 2016, i.e. outside the timeframe of the evaluation, the share of all country-based pooled funds allocated to local NGOs was 23 per cent, or $166 million. Thus, CBPFs are the largest source of direct funding for local NGOs.
OCHA evaluations will be selected by OCHA’s Under-Secretary-General, in consultation with the Executive Management Committee, and in consideration of several factors including among others: relevance of proposed topics, stakeholder interest, usability, evaluability and the potential to fill knowledge gaps. In addition to conducting evaluations to assess its own activities, and reflecting its unique coordination mandate, OCHA also coordinates IAHEs. As evaluations in OCHA can be initiated by requests by the General Assembly, the IASC or humanitarian country teams, the 2018-2021 Plan may not reflect the full scope of OCHA’s evaluations activities during the next four years.
ANNEX: SUMMARIES OF THE EVALUATIONS

For more information, access the full reports on OCHA’s website, at http://www.unocha.org/themes/evaluations-and-reviews/reports

Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Typhoon Haiyan Response (October 2014)

Typhoon Haiyan (locally known as Yolanda) made landfall in the Central Visayas region of the Philippines on 8 November 2013. Over 6,000 people were killed and some 4 million were left homeless, in an area that already suffered high levels of poverty. On 12 November 2013, the Emergency Relief Coordinator formally activated a Level 3 emergency response to the typhoon. In coordination with the Government of the Philippines, the Humanitarian Country Team had begun preparations for response in advance of Haiyan making landfall. Within four days of the typhoon, the HCT released a Humanitarian Action Plan. A massive response was launched with 462 surge personnel deployed within three weeks. The Strategic Response Plan, published on 10 December 2013, was 60% funded against a budget of $788 million. The inter-agency response formed only part of a larger set of responses to the emergency.

The inter-agency humanitarian evaluation (IAHE) provides an independent assessment of the extent to which planned collective objectives set in the Response Plan have been met. Overall the response effectively contributed to emergency needs being met through a timely and relevant immediate response. Initial assistance was appropriately prioritised with a focus on key risks such as communicable disease outbreaks, food insecurity, lack of clean water, emergency shelter and protection. Key cross-cutting challenges were also identified early on, including problems of land rights and supply chain bottlenecks, though strategies to address these have taken time to develop. However, the extent to which the inter-agency response contributed to the overall results is difficult to assess in the absence of more data on assistance outside of the inter-agency coordinated system. The response was characterised by the rapid self-recovery of the Filipino people who, within days, mostly returned home and were rebuilding at least makeshift shelter and seeking to rebuild their livelihoods, though often via use of high cost credit. The IAHE found that the agency response needed to be better able to adapt and customise its activities to support early recovery. While blanket, standard responses to food, water, health and shelter needs were appropriate and effective in the immediate phase of the response, it became apparent that there was a need for more tailored responses that go beyond enabling households to meet immediate basic needs but also to restore livelihoods quickly.

Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Response to the Crisis in South Sudan (November 2015)

Widespread internal conflict in South Sudan began between rival government factions in December 2013. The conflict escalated rapidly as ethnic dimensions emerged and as the fighting spread geographically throughout the north-eastern states of Unity, Upper Nile and Jonglei. The situation has severely impacted the civilian population and displaced millions of people.

An Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation was conducted in South Sudan in April 2015 under
the auspices of Transformative Agenda for the global reform of humanitarian action in large-scale emergencies. Based on the standard terms of reference for the evaluation, a team of five evaluators was tasked with addressing four standard questions for IAEs. The main methodological tool employed was a common evaluation matrix designed to answer the four questions and related sub-questions.

Overall, the lack of outcome data in certain sectors meant that the team was not always able to draw concrete conclusions regarding the achievements of the response. Notwithstanding these constraints, the evaluation concluded that the main response objectives related to saving lives, providing protection and supporting livelihoods were appropriate and have generally been fulfilled. The evidence supports the claim that the response averted any major public health catastrophe, including famine. Working in collaboration with the UN peacekeeping mission, the HCT response reached 100,000 people with life-saving protection in ‘Protection of Civilians’ sites. Strenuous fundraising efforts, led by the Humanitarian Coordinator, raised $1.27 billion in 2014, 70 per cent of the requested funds, which represents an excellent result relative to most other emergency appeals. At the same time, the response was slow to deploy in the early months of 2014, which undoubtedly resulted in preventable deaths and suffering. Response plans were written primarily as fundraising documents rather than as truly strategic documents. Complex and time-consuming coordination structures were present in Juba, but the coordination presence outside of the capital was very light. Despite some excellent practices by a few agencies, the general level of ‘accountability to affected people’ was disappointing and there was a lack of leadership in this area by the Humanitarian Country Team. National NGOs could have played a greater role in the response. As the crisis was becoming protracted this required a complete review and revision of strategic purpose.

Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Response to the Crisis in the Central African Republic (March 2016)

By 2013, the Central African Republic faced a multi-layered humanitarian crisis. For years the country had faced a chronic crisis in human development and governance within a ‘silent and forgotten’ emergency. In 2012–2013 this protracted crisis became increasingly complex with political and intercommunal violence, which would leave almost a fifth of the population displaced and fully half in need of assistance. In December 2013, the emergency became yet more acute and more visible when the crisis engulfed Bangui. During fighting in 2014, tens of thousands of Muslims began fleeing for their lives to Chad, Cameroon or other areas of the country, or else remained trapped in ‘enclaves’ under the protection of peacekeepers. During 2015, the country cautiously envisioned recovery but affected populations required assistance for the foreseeable future.

The Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the response to the emergency in the Central African Republic covers the period from the declaration of a Level 3 (L3) emergency on 11 December 2013 until July 2015. Triggered by the L3 declaration, the evaluation was conducted from June to November 2015. Its objectives are to provide accountability to all stakeholders, contribute to humanitarian learning and offer strategic advice to the Humanitarian Coordinator, Humanitarian Country Team and the Inter-Agency
Standing Committee. The methodology encompassed user-engagement, framework development, stakeholder consultation, mixed method data collection, listening to the affected population and triangulation.

The inter-agency response to the emergency in CAR during 2013–2014 made considerable progress towards providing basic services, reinforcing protection and delivering assistance to around 2 million people in need. It made a strong contribution to the protection of civilians and relieving the crisis, saving many thousands of lives and preventing famine disease outbreaks, mass atrocities and larger refugee outflows. Moreover, its successes were achieved in a highly constrained environment: a collapsed state, unprepared agencies, minimal infrastructure, widespread insecurity and international neglect. The humanitarian response contributed to preventing higher mortality, while the wider humanitarian, military and political response greatly relieved the crisis. All stakeholder groups agree that the response saved lives through provision of food assistance, health, water and sanitation, and protection services. They agreed that the humanitarian response helped to calm the situation, stop a negative spiral, avert a disaster, and “hold the country together.” National leaders believed famine and genocide was averted and relative calm returned. All the same, the response fell short of highest humanitarian aspirations. The scale of targeting and funding remained insufficient compared to needs, the specific needs of vulnerable groups were not addressed, sector results remained modest, results were poor in livelihoods and recovery, displaced people in the bush and in host families were left unassisted, and opportunities were missed to build capacity for national response (except for the health sector), prepare for transition and develop solutions to the displacement crisis.

Evaluation of OCHA Response to the Syria Crisis (March 2016)

The Syria crisis has been arguable the worst humanitarian crisis of the twenty-first century so far. Over 200,000 people had died in fighting during the first five years conflict and over half the country’s population displaced, at the time of the evaluation. Delivering aid inside Syria has proven highly challenging, with fighting parties obstructing aid and civilians under constantly under attack. The aid operation has been one of the largest in living memory and one of the most complex, involving four separate country operations. Gaining access to civilians has been one of the principle challenges, whether due to Government restrictions or rebel brutality.

This evaluation of the OCHA response is part of a recent corporate commitment to evaluation under the organization’s 2014-2017 Strategic Plan. It examines the period from the middle of 2011 to August 2015. This evaluation looks at leadership of the overall response and considers the systematic elements due to the intertwined nature of OCHA’s role.

Against this highly challenging backdrop, the ERC sought to mobilize the humanitarian system to respond in Syria, with partial success. Probably the area where OCHA’s global leadership had the greatest impact was in humanitarian access. The series of Security Council resolutions on access, particularly resolution 2165, opened up new legal avenues for aid to enter areas previously difficult to reach. Broadly, four big strategic themes have dominated the overall response during the crisis: scaling up the response, gaining access to populations in need, dealing with the refugee crisis and its effect on neighbouring countries and unifying the disparate elements of the humanitarian operation. This evaluation has concluded that these were the correct areas to concentrate on, perhaps with the exception of the protection of civilians, which could have received more strategic attention.
Evaluation of the Common Humanitarian Fund (March 2015)

The Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF) model arose from the 2005 Humanitarian Reform agenda, which focused on improving the international community’s ability to achieve more effective and timely humanitarian responses. At a time when the humanitarian system was struggling to cope with gaps and had reached its limits, actors sought greater efficiency, effectiveness and partnerships from humanitarian financing mechanisms, including UN-managed pooled funds (both the Central Emergency Response Fund and country-based pooled funds).

OCHA commissioned this evaluation to review the status of the CHFs, which at the time operated in five countries with large protracted humanitarian operations. The evaluation provided an independent assessment of the CHFs with the intention of identifying their strengths and weaknesses, to identify areas where improvements or changes would make a difference in the CHFs’ operation. The evaluation also considered to what extent the recommendations made in the last triennial review (2011) had been implemented. The intention was to support the further development of country-based pooled funds as an effective funding mechanism.

Overall the value of CHFs remains their ability to be country driven, adapt to the humanitarian needs of their country contexts and retain flexibility. A key factor determining the merits of a CHF is the amount of funding it can allocate. Ensuring that CHFs are well staffed and managed, and that their performance is tracked at country and global levels, has been a challenge at times with certain funds and should remain a priority. Moreover, the contribution of CHFs to the humanitarian response is to be better acknowledged through enhanced monitoring and reporting systems.

Evaluation of Multi-Year Planning (February 2017)

The rationale for multi-year planning is clear: The average duration of a humanitarian appeal is 7 years, and 90 per cent of appeals last longer than three years. There is also a realisation that protracted crises cannot be addressed through humanitarian action alone, and that a fundamental shift is needed to break the cycle of humanitarian dependence and generate more sustainable outcomes. Moving from an annual planning cycle to multi-year planning intuitively presents a number of advantages, which include improvement in collective humanitarian response and stronger coherence between humanitarian and other response elements.

This evaluation was therefore timely as there was great scope to build on the appetite for change following the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS). The evaluation was formative, with an emphasis on building understanding and learning to allow for correcting mistakes, adapting approaches and building on the successes of current experiences with multi-year planning. The findings are based on triangulated evidence collected through visits to Haiti, Somalia and a counterfactual, Myanmar, visits to OCHA headquarters in New York and Geneva, remote interviews for Sahel, the occupied Palestinian territory, South Sudan and Iraq, as well as post-WHS interviews to assess changes in the system.
The evaluation concluded that there is no single, standard model for a multi-year humanitarian plan or planning process. Multi-year humanitarian planning has meant and can mean different things in different places, from full extensions of the humanitarian response plan process to high-level strategic planning processes. It can include planning frameworks in contexts where stand-alone humanitarian planning is required for principled reasons, but can also mean joined-up planning frameworks involving both humanitarian and development systems, with varying degrees of national leadership. A link between planning and fund-raising over multiple years in a single process invokes a fundamental problem - ‘the prioritisation dilemma’ - whereby the drive to prioritise scarce humanitarian funding means that short-term work can displace resilience programmes and other work to tackle longer-term, structural issues. The evaluation recommended that all protracted humanitarian responses should have, at the very least, a multi-year high-level strategic plan that sets out a vision for moving beyond the crisis.
# LIST OF ACRONYMS

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAP</td>
<td>Accountability to Affected Populations</td>
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<tr>
<td>ALNAP</td>
<td>Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance</td>
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<td>CALL</td>
<td>Coordination Accountability and Lesson Learning</td>
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<td>CAP</td>
<td>Consolidated Appeals Process</td>
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<td>CAR</td>
<td>Central African Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBPF</td>
<td>country-based pooled fund</td>
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<td>CERF</td>
<td>Central Emergency Response Fund</td>
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<td>Common Humanitarian Fund</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil-society organisations</td>
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<td>CwC</td>
<td>Communication with Communities</td>
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<td>Emergency Relief Coordinator</td>
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<td>Emergency Response Fund</td>
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<td>Headquarters</td>
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<td>HRP</td>
<td>Humanitarian Response Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>IAHE</td>
<td>Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>IARRM</td>
<td>Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism</td>
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<tr>
<td>IASC</td>
<td>Inter-Agency Standing Committee</td>
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<td>ICWG</td>
<td>Inter-Cluster Working Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>INGO</td>
<td>International non-governmental organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>IPC</td>
<td>Integrated Phase Classification (for food insecurity)</td>
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<td>Level 3 crisis</td>
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<td>Multi Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Operational Peer Review</td>
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<td>SHARP</td>
<td>Syria Humanitarian Action Response Plan</td>
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<td>Transformative Agenda</td>
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<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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<tr>
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<td>World Humanitarian Summit</td>
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