



## CHAPTER 8

# INTER-CONNECTION

### DEFINITION

**How does humanitarian action take account of the medium and longer term, and how does it connect with development and peacebuilding?**

Inter-connection refers to the need to ensure that: a) short-term humanitarian action is designed, planned and implemented to take into account medium- and longer-term considerations; and b) humanitarian action connects appropriately to development and peacebuilding.<sup>25</sup>

Note, ALNAP's 2006 *EHA guide* refers to connectedness. This is now replaced with the more commonly used term 'inter-connection', which can be more easily translated.

### KEY MESSAGES

- Humanitarian programming is largely short-term in nature, but evaluations should consider how programming takes account of the medium and longer term. This temporal dimension is particularly important in protracted crises.
- The connection between humanitarian action and development and peacebuilding is the relational dimension. Forming an evaluative judgement on the nature and appropriateness of this connection depends on the context, issue and mandate of the humanitarian actors being evaluated.
- Both dimensions are important when evaluating partnerships between international and national humanitarian actors.

<sup>25</sup> Inter-connection is an additional criterion for EHA; it is not an OECD criterion. The temporal aspect draws on the definition in ALNAP's *EHA guide* (2006), with the relational dimension added to reflect the expectation that humanitarian actors engage with other actors to avoid a siloed approach, in the spirit of the triple nexus. Whereas the OECD considers the nexus in terms of internal coherence, inter-connection considers the external dimension.

## EXPLANATION OF DEFINITION, AND HOW TO USE THIS CRITERION

### EXPLANATION OF DEFINITION

This criterion is specific to EHA, and it has two dimensions.

First, there is a *temporal dimension*. Humanitarian programmes are often short-term in their planning, funding and implementation. Use this criterion to evaluate if the medium and longer term are considered too.

For example, where humanitarian actors provide free relief services, do they also consider the impact on the medium- and longer-term provision of such services? This is especially important if medium- and longer-term provision are based on a cost-recovery model. This could affect services ranging from education and health to veterinary services and the provision of livestock drugs. Another example is how humanitarian actors engage with existing community institutions and processes. Where local committees are established to oversee targeting of humanitarian assistance, do they consider the medium-term implications of these new local structures replacing, duplicating or even ignoring existing structures? What are the medium- and longer-term implications of international humanitarian actors paying the salaries of public-sector health workers? To what extent is humanitarian action maintaining and strengthening the resilience of households, communities and institutions or undermining it?

Second, there is a *relational dimension*. Humanitarian action is rarely implemented alone, but instead alongside other development, human rights and peacebuilding work. What is the connection between different actors and their programming?

This dimension is particularly important when evaluating international humanitarian actors who make the strongest distinction between different types of action. Evaluate inter-connection to analyse environmental issues too. Has humanitarian action been informed by, and has it connected with, development actors engaged in environmental policy and programming – for example in the siting and management of IDP or refugee camps? Are environmental considerations of forest and water resources and potential degradation considered alongside factors such as security? How do international humanitarian actors engage with local stakeholders, who tend to be multi-dimensional and less likely to distinguish between humanitarian, development and other types of action, instead pivoting between modes of action according to changes in context and needs (McCommon et al, 2021; Buchanan-Smith, 2024).

### WHEN TO SELECT INTER-CONNECTION

Inter-connection is particularly relevant when looking at the bigger picture, beyond meeting immediate needs. As so many humanitarian crises are protracted, the temporal dimension is key. This is especially true if little or no international development programming is in place, and if international humanitarian action fills gaps. Evaluate

inter-connection to explore if humanitarian actors consider medium-term implications and the wider context.

Apply this criterion to evaluate the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding nexus. Consider if humanitarian programming reflects nexus ways of working, and whether action is underpinned by robust contextual analysis to guide what is appropriate.

The extent to which international humanitarian actors invest in knowledge exchange and support national actors fits under inter-connection. This is key to promoting locally led humanitarian action (see [Chapter 11](#)). Are international and national humanitarian actors supporting and developing civil society capacity with a longer-term perspective? Is the partnership simply contractual, focused on delivery in the short term? Do international actors recognise the multi-dimensional and multi-mandate nature of national NGOs?

## HOW INTER-CONNECTION RELATES TO OTHER CRITERIA

Inter-connection relates closely to effectiveness and impact, both of which may be enhanced or compromised by temporal and relational aspects. Effectiveness may be improved by humanitarian actors drawing on the knowledge and experience of development actors, and by connecting to existing structures and systems. For example, in new and large IDP settlements, engagement between humanitarian actors and those with long-term knowledge of and responsibility for water and sanitation management can ensure effective and sustainable service provision (see [Box 3](#)). On the other hand, failing to plan for an exit strategy to transition from free water services in a crisis to a cost-recovery model could compromise the medium- to longer-term impact of water provision.

### BOX 3: SUSTAINABILITY AND INTER-CONNECTION

The OECD defines sustainability as ‘the extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue, or are likely to continue’ (OECD, 2019: 12). In short, will the benefits last?

There are economic, financial, social and environmental dimensions to sustainability (OECD, 2019). You may consider sustainability under the inter-connection criterion or substitute inter-connection for sustainability.

Note that sustainability is not a relevant question, or criterion, for all humanitarian action. If evaluating the protection and provision of services to refugees fleeing conflict across a border, for example, it may not be appropriate to ask if the benefits will last. Instead, ask to what extent longer-term and durable solutions are being considered. For the sustainability of emergency water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) interventions provided by international actors in response to a cholera outbreak, ask what will happen when they withdraw. Has sufficient local capacity been built and is there an appropriate exit plan?

For example, in UNHCR's Country Strategy Evaluation in South Sudan in 2022/23, there is an evaluation question on sustainability that covers both government capacity and environmental considerations: *To what extent has handover to the Government of refugee management and care been effectively considered including in relation to capacity development, and deployment of climate-friendly sustainable structures?*<sup>26</sup>

The World Food Programme's (WFP) (2023a) evaluation of its Interim Country Strategic Plan (ICSP) in Algeria embeds the concept of sustainability within an evaluation question on the triple nexus. It asks: *To what extent has the ICSP facilitated and capitalised on strategic linkages on the humanitarian, development and peace nexus?* The evaluation focuses on support to the Sahrawi refugee population in Algeria, one of the most protracted refugee situations in the world that dates back to the 1970s. In the evaluation, the concept of sustainability is implicit rather than explicit. It is explored through support for sustainable resilience activities for refugees, which mainly focuses on livelihoods. It notes tensions in pursuing sustainable resilience activities, ranging from political aspects that relate to refugee caseloads, to technical, funding and environmental aspects. The evaluation recommends how to promote the sustainability of (mostly livelihood-oriented) 'complementary activities' (WFP, 2023a).

## SHIFTING THE LENS: POWER AND POSITIONALITY

A narrow view of crises as discrete emergencies – rather than recurring cycles of seasonal shocks or repeated displacement – can overlook historical memory and long-term local knowledge. By relying solely on project reports or data collected during a narrow window, your analysis may bias institutional timelines and erase valuable insights from those with lived experience across generations.

Be attentive to the ways communities affected by crisis situate humanitarian assistance within historical narratives. Do these narratives account for how trust, fatigue or hope have accumulated over time? Explore how humanitarian assistance has affected the community's ability to imagine and shape their own futures – not just whether they have 'transitioned' effectively from relief to recovery.

26 See UNHCR 'Terms of Reference Country Strategy Evaluation South Sudan 2018-22' (UNHCR, 2023b).

## METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

### Key consideration A

Consult a diverse range of stakeholders, including development, human rights and peacebuilding representatives, plus those involved in long-term public services alongside emergency providers.

### Methodological implications for commissioners

Plan for wide consultation so adequate time and resources are allocated. Reflect this in the TOR.

Consider the team composition, and whether to broaden skills and experience beyond humanitarian.

### Methodological implications for evaluators

Map stakeholders during the evaluation's inception phase, so actors across different spheres are consulted.

Select the most appropriate ways to consult different stakeholders – from online surveys to focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

### Key consideration B

You may have to reach an evaluative judgement of whether the relationship between humanitarian and other actors, and their respective programming, is appropriate. This will likely be determined by the context, nature and mandate of the actors being evaluated.<sup>27</sup>

### Methodological implications for commissioners

Clarify organisational policies and frameworks to be used as the reference point to determine if the relationship between humanitarian action and other development action is appropriate and aligns (see section on Humanitarian principles and inter-connection).

### Methodological implications for evaluators

Obtain wide-ranging perspectives on the nature and appropriateness of the relationship between humanitarian and other actors.

Ensure familiarity with the reference points to use.

Use evidence from other contexts to draw conclusions on what constitutes an appropriate relationship between humanitarian and other actors.

<sup>27</sup> In some highly politicised contexts, humanitarian actors may maintain a distance to respect the humanitarian principles of independence and neutrality. In other protracted crises, they may work closely with development actors to ensure the short-term provision of emergency and protection services links to medium- and longer-term systems and services.

## EVALUATION EXAMPLE

### Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) of the humanitarian response in Somalia (March 2025)

#### Background

The IAHE of the humanitarian response in Somalia was launched in November 2023. It evaluates the collective response of Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) members throughout 2022–2024 to drought response and famine prevention in the protracted humanitarian crisis in Somalia, and provides feedback on the implementation of the Humanitarian Country Team's ongoing reforms. The IAHE was undertaken as a learning exercise and to strengthen accountability.

#### How the evaluation addresses inter-connection and the nexus

The evaluation analyses both temporal and relational aspects. It asks: How well did the humanitarian response link to development efforts and invest in resilience? And it asks an overarching question: How well coordinated and led was the response and what other factors influenced the quality and scale of the response?

The evaluation explores if the stated longer-term objective of sustaining lives and building resilience was upheld in practice. It pays attention to funding allocations, feedback from interviewees, and the prioritisation of short-term life-saving humanitarian activities over future structural vulnerabilities.

The evaluation finds evidence that short-term assistance had both positive and negative effects on resilience. It enabled people affected by the crisis to repay debt, but targeting approaches created incentives for those displaced and living in more durable sites to move to newly established sites. This undermined longer-term efforts to build resilience. Community members shared the view that humanitarian assistance should focus on sustainable solutions rather than short-term relief.

The evaluation recommends how short-term life-saving assistance can contribute to longer-term goals.

*Source: IAHE (2025).*

## HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND INTER-CONNECTION

Independence and neutrality are particularly pertinent to inter-connection and to the relational dimension of this criterion.

Ask to what extent and how is the relationship between humanitarian and non-humanitarian actors guided by humanitarian principles, and how and why have compromises and trade-offs been made? Consider the relationship between humanitarian actors and the respective authority (including government), where that authority is party to the conflict. For example, have development priorities taken precedence over the independence of humanitarian action? What are the implications for negotiating and securing operational access to those in need, and thus for the principles of humanity and impartiality?

Explore how operational humanitarian actors are perceived by the population affected by crisis in terms of their independence. This may include the independence of humanitarian actors from donor governments and foreign policy objectives. It relates to the principle of neutrality and being perceived as not taking sides. See UNEG (2024) for examples.

Example evaluation question (adapted from UN Women, 2019):

*How has the organisation managed its partnerships and relationships to ensure its humanitarian action is (and is perceived as) independent and neutral?*