The State of The Humanitarian Research and Innovation Ecosystem – First Look at Insights from a Multi-Level Global Consultation

Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Weeks (HNPW)
27 April 2023
Some humanitarian crises receive disproportionately more research attention than other crises of similar devastation and magnitude.
Meet the panel

Nigel Timmins
Chair

Dr. Marian Abouzeid
Panellist

Jessica Camburn
Panellist
Meet the panel

Maggie Schmitz  
Panellist

Rita Rhayem  
Panellist

Anton Shevchenko  
Panellist

Mark Bowden  
Panellist
The Global Prioritisation Exercise (GPE) for Humanitarian Research and Innovation (HRI)
We are on the edge of an abyss. And we are moving in the wrong direction. The world must wake up. Now is the time to restore trust. Now is the time to inspire hope. Now is the time to deliver.

António Guterres
United Nation Secretary-General Remarks at the UN General Assembly, 2021
Better humanitarian outcomes through HRI

Visibility

Improve Co-ordination

Inform Priority-Setting
The level of research and innovation activities and funding varies significantly across clusters and humanitarian contexts. To effectively address the most pressing humanitarian issues, it is necessary to prioritise research and innovation needs and investments more strategically.

Top recipient countries of HRI funding between 2017 and 2021 (IATI)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recipient country</th>
<th>% of total</th>
<th>Amount $</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>50.3%</td>
<td>248.3m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>53.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>16.9m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>16.7m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>13.4m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>11.7m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESAR</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>11.1m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Sudan</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>10.7m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>10.8m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central African Republic</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>10.1m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other countries*</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>99.8m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>494m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In your opinion or experience, what is the most influential factor on humanitarian research and innovation funding, and research and innovation attention?
What makes an issue an issue? Why do some crises, issues, population subgroups receive more research and innovation attention than others?

Preliminary findings from the GPE Regional and National Consultations Consortium
GPE Regional and National Consultations
Multi-stakeholder consultations in 6 regions and 4 national settings
134 interviews with 141 participants based in 50 countries

Ethics approval obtained from Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Ref: 2022-163).

For Southern and Eastern Africa and Kenya consultations, additional approvals were obtained from the Strathmore University Institutional Ethics Review Committee (SU-ISERC1445/22).
Some humanitarian crises receive disproportionately more research attention than other crises of similar devastation and magnitude.

In other words, the level of research attention is not always proportional to the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis. Some population groups also receive more research attention than others.
Why do you think this might be the case? What other factors influence research funding and research attention?
Interview profiles

120 interviews with 126 participants from a range of organizational types.

Number of interviews per CONSULTATION

- Lebanon
- Kenya
- Indonesia
- India
- West Asia & North Africa
- West & Central Africa
- South & Eastern Africa
- South & Central Asia
- Oceania, East Asia & South-East Asia
- Latin America & the Caribbean

Percentage of interviews by TYPE OF INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION

- Other
- UN agency
- Private Sector
- National/local NGO
- INGO
- Independent researcher/organization
- Governmental / intergovernmental
- Academic institution

'Other' types of institutional affiliations include foundations, international financial institutions, multilateral institutions, and partnerships / networks / consortia

** Two participants had dual affiliations and are captured just under academic
Interview profiles

Most organisations engage with both humanitarian research and innovation; participants were predominantly senior.
Selected key findings

Preliminary results
Differences in research attention are not always disproportionate

- Funding and attention are driven by need
- Some crises and issues don’t need the same level of R&I as others, or don’t need *new* R&I

Money that would be spent on research, months or years in advance could not necessarily be attributed to that response. ...I think it's unfair to say that it didn't receive the research and technology [attention] because it benefits from research and technology that would have been done for a generation before.

South and Central Asia, INGO
### Key reasons for disproportionate attention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reported reasons for differential research attention</th>
<th>% OF INTERVIEWS</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geopolitical and political considerations</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donor-related issues</td>
<td>41%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Influence of the media</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Access to funding / funding limitations</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of affected populations</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of value-add of research in crises</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Functioning in silos</td>
<td>3%</td>
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</tbody>
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Geopolitical and political considerations
Geopolitical and political considerations:

**Geopolitical and political considerations, by CONSULTATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Percentage of interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Asia &amp; North Africa</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West &amp; Central Africa</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South &amp; Eastern Africa</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South &amp; Central Asia</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania, East Asia &amp; South-East Asia</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America &amp; the Caribbean</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Geopolitical and political considerations, by TYPE OF INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Percentage of interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN agency</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Sector</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National/local NGO</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INGO</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent researcher/ organization</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governmental / intergovernmental</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic institution</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Geopolitical and political considerations:
Geopolitical and political considerations:

Potential impact on large economic powers

- Crises or events that have minimal impact on large powers and economies do not attract research attention
- Those that may potentially impact global or western economies or pose a security risk do attract attention
- There has been heavy investment in research for some crises more than others in order to inform how to contain the event and prevent spillover including averting extensive migration and population displacement.
Geopolitical and political considerations:

Level of geopolitical significance to large economic powers
Vested economic interests
Investment and attention directed to settings that are rich in natural resources or where investment may generate potential political, economic or trade gains.

Foreign policy considerations
- Extent of alignment with foreign policy
- Foreign policy can also impede investment

Geographic location of a crisis and proximity bias
Geopolitical interests of former colonizing countries
Potential impact on stability of the crisis-affected setting
Donor-related factors
Donor-related factors

Donor related factors, by CONSULTATION

- Lebanon: 57%
- Kenya: 78%
- Indonesia: 57%
- India: 57%
- West Asia & North Africa: 11%
- West & Central Africa: 47%
- South & Eastern Africa: 57%
- South & Central Asia: 31%
- Oceania, East Asia & South-East Asia: 30%
- Latin America & the Caribbean: 41%

Donor related factors, by TYPE OF INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION

- Other: 75%
- UN agency: 40%
- Private Sector: 25%
- National/local NGO: 55%
- INGO: 50%
- Independent researcher/organization: 14%
- Governmental/intergovernmental: 27%
- Academic institution: 19%
Donor-related factors:

What donors prioritise

- Donors may prioritise their own agendas, interests or visibility over needs
- Donors prioritise operational and/or lifesaving activities over R&I
- Western donors bias and lens influence R&I
- Donors prioritise sustainable interventions or infrastructures
Donor-related issues:

Factors influencing donors

- Political priorities, economic interests, and national government agendas
- Global prioritisation and international agendas rather than national level priorities
- Public attention or visibility
- Humanitarianism
The influence of media
The influence of media

Influence of the media, by CONSULTATION

Influence of the media, by TYPE OF INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION

- Lebanon: 43%
- Kenya: 0%
- Indonesia: 29%
- India: 14%
- West Asia & North Africa: 33%
- West & Central Africa: 13%
- South & Eastern Africa: 25%
- South & Central Asia: 25%
- Oceania, East Asia & South-East Asia: 24%
- Latin America & the Caribbean: 40%

- Other: 25%
- UN agency: 27%
- Private Sector: 25%
- National/local NGO: 18%
- INGO: 27%
- Independent researcher/organization: 14%
- Governmental/intergovernmental: 25%
- Academic institution: 40%
The influence of media

- Increased media attention generates increased funding in general, which means that (more) funds are also available for research.
- The level of media attention can also directly influence the level of research funding.
- Some participants noted that media attention fades with time, and so too does funding and research interest.
- One participant noted that the media is a profit-driven industry
Nature and characteristics of a crisis or issue
Nature and characteristics of a crisis or issue

Nature of crisis or issue, by CONSULTATION

- Lebanon: 71%
- Kenya: 33%
- Indonesia: 57%
- India: 0%
- West Asia & North Africa: 6%
- West & Central Africa: 20%
- South & Eastern Africa: 36%
- South & Central Asia: 31%
- Oceania, East Asia & South-East Asia: 20%
- Latin America & the Caribbean: 24%

Nature of crises or issues, by TYPE OF INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION

- Other: 50%
- UN agency: 40%
- Private Sector: 0%
- National/local NGO: 36%
- INGO: 23%
- Independent researcher/organization: 29%
- Governmental / intergovernmental: 20%
- Academic institution: 19%
Nature and characteristics of a crisis or issue

- Scale or severity of the event or issue
- Newness of the crisis
- Sudden onset disasters vs protracted & recurrent crises
- Type of crisis
- Humanitarian versus development
- Location of the crisis
Key issues identified by donors

Key issues reported in interviews with donors

- **Feasibility and appropriateness of conducting research**: 27%
- **Access to funding and funding limitations**: 27%
- **Characteristics of affected populations**: 14%
- **Perception of research in crises**: 9%
- **Individuals or organizational considerations**: 9%
- **National governments issues**: 14%
- **Nature of crises or issues**: 27%
- **Media as influencer**: 32%
- **Donor related issues**: 36%
- **Geopolitical and political considerations**: 50%
- **Functioning in silos**: 5%
- **Perception of research in crises**: 5%
### Key issues reported by institution type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION</th>
<th>MOST COMMONLY REPORTED ISSUES (% OF ALL INTERVIEWS WITH THIS TYPE OF ORGANISATION)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic institutions</strong></td>
<td>- Political and geopolitical issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The influence of the media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Characteristics of crisis-affected populations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Governmental / intergovernmental organisations</strong></td>
<td>- The influence of the media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Geopolitical and political issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Donor-related factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent researcher / research organisation</strong></td>
<td>- Perception of research in crises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Nature of crisis or issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- National government issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INGO</strong></td>
<td>- Geopolitical and political issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Donor-related issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The influence of the media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National / Local NGO</strong></td>
<td>- Donor-related issues</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>UN Agency</strong></td>
<td>- Geopolitical and political considerations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Donor related issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Nature of crises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Private sector</strong></td>
<td>- Geopolitical and political issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Characteristics of crisis-affected populations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong>*</td>
<td>- Donor related issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Geopolitical and political issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Nature of crisis or issue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Other* types of institutional affiliations include foundations, international financial institutions, multilateral institutions, and partnerships / networks / consortia.
Suggested recommendations

Recommendations suggested by participants Advocacy

- Ensure that funding and research attention are needs-based
- Balanced role of media
- Sustainable funding
- Research on how to influence donors
- Innovations and use of new technologies to address logistic challenges and facilitate remote research and programming
- Build research capacity
- Collaborative and inclusive effort to identify research needs
So, this is something that we need to consider... that if the research organization, the donor organization, government and humanitarian actors can actually sit together and identify the research needs, I think that can actually help researchers and also donors to allocate, proportionately allocate resources, otherwise all the research organizations are working silos.

*South and Central Asia, INGO*
Conclusions

• Factors other than need are widely perceived as influencing research funding and attention
• Loud and clear call to move towards an equitable, needs-based system
• Inclusive research priority-setting process required to identify priority topics and develop equitable, agreed research agenda
• Important for all stakeholder groups within the R&I system to examine their own roles and how they can contribute to a more equitable system
Acknowledgments

• Study participants who shared their views and insights
• 'Reasons for disproportionate attention’ research team:
  Marian Abouzeid, Zeinab El-Dirani, Yasmen Baroudi, Chaza Akik
• The Consortium acknowledges the contributions of the American University of Beirut to the initial conceptualisation of this work
What are the system-level priorities for HRI?
System-level priorities for HRI

Our community and global consultations identified these critical areas for our collective action:

• Needs-Investments alignment
• Flexible and long-term funding
• Improve funders co-ordination
• Demonstrate the impact of HRI
Keep up to date with our progress and news – join our email list.

www.elrha.org/gpe