Event
“2022 Washington Humanitarian Forum: Closing the Gap”


DATE
Wednesday, November 9, 2022 at 9:00 a.m. ET

FEATURING
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Kimberly Flowers: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the second Humanitarian Forum at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. My name is Kimberly Flowers. I’m a senior associate here for the Humanitarian Agenda and the Global Food Security Program. Formerly, I was the founding director of the Humanitarian Agenda Program, and I launched this Humanitarian Forum three years ago. So for me, it’s quite a gift to continue to engage with CSIS. And it’s a real honor to be here.

First, we’d like to thank the U.S. Agency for International Development and their Bureau for Humanitarian Affairs. Without their partnership with CSIS, the Humanitarian Agenda Program and this event would not be possible. I’d also like to acknowledge and applaud the CSIS Humanitarian Agenda team, the multiple CSIS programs who’ve collaborated and worked on panels for today, the streaming and broadcasting team, as well as, in particular, I’d like to call out Jake Kurtzer, who’s been aptly leading the Humanitarian Agenda Program the last few years. He is missed here at CSIS. And today I’d also like to call our Jude Larnerd for his efforts, and their efforts, on making today a success.

Here at CSIS, we take security seriously. So I am the security officer for today. We don’t anticipate there will be any issues, but if there are, for those here in person there’s an emergency exit just on the door where we came in, as well as to the right and behind the elevators here on the second floor.

Our theme for our forum today is “Closing the Gap.” If you’ve worked in the humanitarian field for any time, you know what I’m talking about. This gap relates to the number of people in need that continues to be higher, many highest than ever before, or at least highest than we’ve seen in many decades. And then the funding that’s needed for that continues to not keep pace. In fact, the overall official humanitarian assistance funding has plateaued. And the gap just keeps getting bigger.

And then you look at the broader context, right? Humanitarian staff are overstretched and, quite frankly, exhausted. Local humanitarian staff often face threats to their life and face serious access constraints. There are more than 50 civil wars and conflicts happening in the world today. The climate change-related emergencies happening more often, happening with more severity. COVID-19 pandemic is still taking an extreme toll. Am I making you feel sad yet? This is really grim, right? (Laughs.) And it just keeps going. You have extreme poverty that’s rising. So are food and energy prices. Forced displacement is at an all-time high. And there’s the potential for famine in the Horn of Africa. It’s a very, very grim picture.

And then you have the U.S. media and, I would also say, many U.S. policymakers that are focused singularly just on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as the most important humanitarian crisis today. Certainly deserves
attention, but limited aid is being diverted to the crisis there while other humanitarian crises are being left behind. You will see in the program for today, and for the conference today, that’s why some of our country-led panel discussions are focusing on issues in Afghanistan, Syria, Haiti, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

So given this context, is the global humanitarian system currently in place able to keep up with what’s going on in terms of demand? How can we reshape the system to do more with less, to truly engage nontraditional partners, and to modernize and adapt to a world where, unfortunately, humanitarian crises seem to be growing in number and severity?

Well, we have two humanitarian experts and leaders with us this morning that’s going to help us think through this and better understand these global challenges that we’re facing. We have Juliet Parker, the head of ALNAP, and we have Sarah Charles, who leads the USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Affairs. If you are listening online, I encourage as you listen to their remarks to submit questions through the button on the event page. If you are here in person, you can also submit questions using the QR code that’s on your table.

So now it’s my honor to introduce Juliet Parker. Juliet is the director of ALNAP. ALNAP, we love acronyms in this sector, don’t we? (Laughs.) ALNAP stands for the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action, which does exactly that. It’s an organization that conducts independent assessments of the humanitarian sector using knowledge, data, and evidence so that the humanitarian sector can improve its response to these crises that we’ve talked about.

Juliet is joining us from London. She has over two decades of experience in the humanitarian sector, including working at, most recently before ALNAP, the Action Against Hunger in U.K., as well as many years with Christian Aid. She’s an expert at monitoring evaluation, accountability, and learning. And she has a passion. And now she’s in a position where she can use that, as well as evidence, to help us understand and improve what is working and what is not in the humanitarian sector. Please give a warm welcome to Juliet Parker. (Applause.)

Juliet Parker: Great. Thank you. I am delighted and honored to be here with you all today.

The ALNAP State of the Humanitarian System Report provides the longest-running evidence base on the performance of international humanitarian action, reaching back nearly 15 years over four previous editions. This year’s edition covers humanitarian response from the years 2018 to 2021, inclusive. Each of our reports is compiled through at least 10 main inputs, including original in-country research, surveys, financial and demographic
analysis, and a synthesis of publicly available evaluations. Drawing on these inputs, we not only assess performance but are also able to draw comparisons to previous editions in order to provide the long view on how the humanitarian system is changing over time.

One of the defining features of this year's edition is that the humanitarian system is facing challenges unlike those it has seen before. The questions I'd like to briefly explore with you this morning are: How has the humanitarian system performed over the past four years of extreme crisis? And how well does this set it up for a difficult and uncertain future? I'll answer these questions by highlighting key findings from our report across three main areas. First, the demand for humanitarian assistance and protection over the past four years. Second, how the size and shape of the humanitarian system has changed. And finally, some key findings on how humanitarian assistance has performed.

Starting with the global context. Over the past four years we have seen regime changes in Afghanistan and Myanmar, and the most significant disaster in Haiti since the 2010 earthquake. Conflicts grew longer and more numerous, and there was a rise in climate-related disasters. And all of this before we even get to the unprecedented crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. The impacts of conflict and disasters have been clear as the number of people living in forced displacement doubled over the past decade. And just in the past five years, the number of people facing acute food insecurity rose by 33 percent. And this is before the war in Ukraine drove up food prices astronomically this year.

Looking at the pandemic, while the direct impacts of COVID-19 were not as severe as first feared, the indirect impacts, through widespread economic shutdown and lockdown restrictions, were profound. Protection risks soared. Millions of children lost access to education. And nearly 100 million people worldwide were estimated to be pushed below the poverty line, making them less able to withstand other shocks. As a result of all these dynamics, we saw the number of people estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance and protection in the U.N. appeals system nearly double over a five-year period, reaching 255 million in 2021 after peaking at 439 million in 2020 due to the pandemic.

At the same time that the demand for humanitarian assistance increased, the ability of humanitarians to stand in solidarity with people affected by crisis became even more difficult. Conflict is not only on the rise, but we found consistently the nature of conflict is changing and making humanitarian access more difficult. This is illustrated by the rise of attacks on aid workers, which rose by 67 percent between 2017 and 2021, with national staff comprising 95 percent of the victims of these attacks. And of course, access
challenges go beyond direct violence and include increased bureaucracy, political interference, and counterterrorism rules and sanctions.

Our last report in 2018 noted a sharp decline in respect for international humanitarian law, and the situation has only worsened in recent years. As one humanitarian worker we spoke to said, the system is in a fight for core norms. And these challenges with humanitarian space have real impacts on the ability of agencies to deliver aid, as we saw in our survey of aid recipients in Ethiopia. Here, when we asked our questions about the quantity and quality of aid received, the responses in Tigray behind the government blockade were considerably lower than in other parts of the country. And in fact, these responses were some of the lowest satisfaction scores we’ve seen since our first survey in 2011.

So as the job became more difficult, how has the system’s size and capacity changed to meet this? Just to pause briefly here in definitions, our research focuses on the international humanitarian system, which we primarily consider to be organizations that receive international private or public funding for humanitarian response. This includes NGOs, both national and international, U.N. agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, and the branches of government involved in humanitarian donorship or response. By any measure, in terms of money, people, and footprint, this system has expanded significantly in recent years.

This is seen in the doubling of in-country humanitarian personnel and the estimated number of humanitarian organizations has increased from roughly 4,500 to over 5,000, primarily due to the increase of local and national organizations. Funding for humanitarian action has also doubled over the decade, reaching $31.3 billion U.S. in 2021. But, as many of us are aware, funding has leveled off in recent years. And as a result, the gap between what is required to support people in crisis and what is available has widened. The green blocks on the chart here behind me indicate levels of resource, and the black dots above them indicate required funds. And as you can see, the line between them gets ever longer as we move from 2012 to today, with 2020 being the year in which this gap reached an all-time high, with appeals only 51 percent funded.

When we look behind the global figures at a more granular level, we can see two important trends. The first is that there is significant variation in funding levels for different crises. Forty percent of all humanitarian assistance went to just five countries. And while these certainly featured some of the highest caseloads, other crises also featured severe need, yet received far less than what was required. And in fact, the gaps between the best-funded U.N. appeal and those worst-funded appeal is widening. A few
years ago, there was around a 70 percent gap between the best and worst funded. And this widened to a 181 percentage-point gap in 2020.

A second reflection from the data is that the system continues to be highly concentrated in terms of who gives and who directly receives humanitarian funding. When we look at who receives humanitarian funding over 2018 to 2021, 40 percent of all funding went directly to three U.N. agencies, with the World Food Program receiving more than a quarter all humanitarian funding directly. This poses some questions for the ability of the humanitarian system to change, when we consider that local and national actors actually saw their share of direct funding decline over the study period.

The call to localize humanitarian action became ever stronger in the past four years, linked to calls to decolonize aid, and the COVID-19 pandemic provided new opportunities for local leadership. But despite these drivers for change, we saw no significant progress, with national NGOs saying that partnerships remained akin to subcontracting relationships in which they had little say or power. Six years on from the World Humanitarian Summit, our localization research with the NEAR Network found that debates over how localized the system should become and how best to get there are still ongoing.

Turning to who gives assistance, we again see a coordinated theme of concentration amongst the top five donors, who provided over 50 percent of all humanitarian assistance last year, with the United States now contributing over 30 percent of all humanitarian aid globally. This high concentration in who gives and who receives humanitarian aid has one major implication, which is that changes in approach made by these top five donors, or changes made by the U.N. system, can lead to significant change and performance in the system, whether that’s for better or for worse.

And that brings me onto how this system actually performed over the past four years, really looking at two questions: Does humanitarian action work, and how does it treat the people it aims to serve? Here, our focus was really on evidence of outcomes rather than outputs in the report. So what did the system achieve rather than what did it simply deliver. And while the evidence base still needs improving and there are still data gaps around issues like mortality rates in crisis, overall, I think it is important to stress that the available evidence tells us that humanitarian aid does work and is consistently achieving a range of positive short-term outcomes for people affected by crisis.

We found many examples covering education, water and sanitation, better food security, and nutrition, and improved livelihoods. Of course, one of the clearest areas where we see consistent evidence of outcomes is in cash
assistance. And you can see on the slide here just a few examples of the outcomes cash assistance achieved over 2018 to 2021 in multiple contexts. One that stuck out to us is lower morbidity rates for children under the age of five. And therefore, the fact that the system expanded its use of cash and voucher assistance from 14 percent to 20 percent of all humanitarian aid in 2020 can be taken as an illustration of its improved effectiveness.

We also saw positive developments in the timeliness of humanitarian response. This was largely driven by investments in preparedness, forecast-based financing, and anticipatory action. There was also emerging evidence that anticipatory action is more effective. In Bangladesh, providing aid before the monsoon hit led to measurable improved outcomes for households. But at the moment, these efforts around anticipation and crisis prevention have been largely pockets of experimentation and are not scaling out to really change the model of how humanitarian aid is delivered, as we are now unfortunately seeing in the delayed response to the Horn of Africa drought.

While short-term aid continues to be effective and appreciated, crises are getting longer and more frequent. And this means more people are experiencing humanitarian aid more repeatedly or for longer periods of time. And yet, we saw that humanitarian agencies are not adapting what they offer to address changes in need over time, nor are they working to provide or address longer-term priorities of effected people to support their resilience. As a result of this, the number of affected people who felt aid was relevant declined slightly since 2018 from 39 percent to 34 percent.

We heard from aid recipients in Yemen and DRC that while food aid and other short-term forms of assistance were useful for the, there were many other issues such as broader health care, access to education, and livelihood support, where they were receiving little to no support. This points to the need to join up the dots between humanitarian assistance and longer-term development and peace aid. While we saw strong policy shifts, restructuring of donor agencies and new initiatives around the so-called HDP nexus, at country-level the impact was not evident. There were frustrations that the discussion on closing the gaps between short-term and long-term assistance was too abstract and confusing, that programmatic progress was piecemeal, and that there was no collective accountability to implement collective outcomes.

Turning now to how the system treats people affected by crisis, on the positive side when we looked at the dignity of people in crisis a majority, 73 percent, said they felt treated with dignity. In addition, we also saw tangible improvements in the resources and systems used to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as a strong policy response to these issues led by the U.S. and other donors. Also positively, we saw that the participation
of affected people continues to be linked to better performance. The aid recipients in our survey who said they were consulted prior to receiving aid were 2.2 times more likely to say that aid was relevant, 2.7 times more likely to say that the aid they received was of good quality, and 2.5 times more likely to say that they received enough aid.

This is one reason why it is perhaps disappointing that we found that overall the level of engagement and participation of crisis-affected people in humanitarian decision-making has not improved over the last four years. Only one in three people in our survey said they have the opportunity to provide their opinion on aid they received. This was slightly surprising, as many agencies have made significant effort to implement feedback mechanisms and improve engagement over the past four years. But we think a likely explanation for this is the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced many agencies to switch to remote methods of communication, which are less preferred and accessible by many aid recipients.

So what does all of this mean for the future of humanitarian action and the priorities of the largest donor to humanitarian aid? We’ve seen that the humanitarian system is larger but has not grown in proportion to the size of the problem it’s trying to tackle, which is growing both due to increasing caseload and increasing ambition. It is effective, but narrowly so. The agency of people in crisis is increasingly taken into account, but the system is still far from putting people fully at the center. And the system is still far from putting people fully at the center. And the system is evolving, making observable improvements. But these are not as significant or as fast as desired or, some might argue, as is required.

And as the system debates its future identity, it is entering an era in which it is consistently under direct threat and cannot take multilateralism or global affirmation of humanitarian norms as a given. Looking at the challenging years ahead, all of this means the humanitarian system will need to grapple with what solidarity with people in crisis looks like in terms of its scale of ambition, in terms of its presence, in terms of what it offers, how it engages, and who leads it. And it will need to do this internal work with simultaneously defending the core humanitarian idea that all of us have a moral responsibility to stand with all people affected by crisis.

The international system is going to need to be more assertive about humanitarian space, more ambitious about what people deserve, and yet more humble about knowing its place alongside others to deliver it. Let us hope it succeeds. Thank you. (Applause.)

Ms. Flowers: Thank you so much, Juliet. You know, one of the things that’s sticking out to me, there’s a lot of numbers in all of this. And if you look at the full report of the state of the sector from ALNAP, it’s over 300 pages. There’s a smaller
executive summary too, so don’t worry. But it’s rich. It’s full of a lot of
details.

But some of the highlights that’s staying with me from Juliet’s presentation is
looking at the numbers in terms of funding, right? So over 31 billion
(dollars) in funding. And of that, that 31 percent is from the United States.
That’s a lot of dollars. That’s a lot of taxpayers’ dollars. And the person that
is responsible for helping implement a lot of those dollars is Sarah Charles,
who we have with us today. And let me tell you a little bit about Sarah
before she comes up.

Sarah, under the Biden administration, is the assistant to the administrator
for USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance. Most of you are probably
familiar with BHA, which it’s also called, but it’s the U.S. government lead in
terms of international disaster response. So it has a mandate to save lives,
alleviate human suffering, and reduce the impact of disasters. So a huge task,
given today’s context. Prior to going to USAID, Ms. Charles was the senior
director for policy and advocacy with the International Rescue Committee.

She also worked for a number of years at the White House with the National
Security Council directing humanitarian affairs and also working on strategic
planning. Her experience has a wide range with a lot of different countries
and crises, including a lot of work with refugee work as well as working on
the response to the Ebola crisis and working on the global refugee and
migration crisis in general. She also previous to the NSC worked at USAID in
working on the Middle East in USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives.

She helped lead USAID’s response to the post-Arab Spring efforts. When she
was at International Rescue Committee, she also worked on the emergency
response in Darfur. So she has a wealth of experience, decades of – decades
of experience in the field working both with NGOs as well as the government.
And she’s here today to give us her thoughts, both to the report and what’s
happening in the sector today.

Sarah, over to you.

Sarah Charles: Thank you, Kim. And thank you, CSIS, for having me here today. And thank
you, Juliet, for sharing the findings of ALNAP’s important work. Your report
demonstrates the incredible impact of the global humanitarian assistance,
what I think is a really meaty and important deep dive into the real
challenges that we’re facing as we head into 2023.

I’d like to share some thoughts on the themes of the report, but also really
looking forward to diving in in more detail during the question-and-answer
session. First, I want to talk about the humanitarian financing gap. Over the
last five years, the number of people in need has nearly doubled, from 141
million to 274 million. And the amount of funding required to meet those needs has been on the same trajectory, increasing from 23.9 billion (dollars) in 2017 to 41 billion (dollars) in 2022. As this group knows well, this is the confluence of COVID, climate change, new and ongoing conflicts. It’s also due to the humanitarian system being stretched to not only meet lifesaving needs, but basic needs and social support in crises that have been going on for five, 10, 20, in some cases 40 years.

However, we haven’t seen a commiserate increase in humanitarian funding. The 2022 global appeal, as we heard, was nearly 60 percent underfunded. And the donor base remains slim. In recent years, as we heard from Juliet, three largest donors have accounted for roughly 60 percent of all humanitarian funding. And as Kim noted, in this report it talks about the U.S. being responsible for approximately 30 percent. I think when we do add up the receipts for 2022, we’re going to see that percentage skyrocket to closer to 40-45 percent this year. This model is unsustainable. It’s critical that we engage new actors to help us safe lives, alleviate suffering and, as importantly, support communities’ resilience.

BHA is working diligently on this front. We’re working to bring more attention and collective donor action to keep multilateral development banks active in fragile settings. In particular, we’re encouraging the banks to work closely with the humanitarian system to address social protection and basic service needs driven by protracted crises. We’re also trying to crowd in private financing. USAID, in partnership with IOM, is piloting a platform for increasing coordination between the humanitarian system and diaspora groups that are best placed often to get resources quickly to communities in need. We’re also working with philanthropic donors. For instance, USAID recently mobilized $280 million from private donors to meet the needs of children facing the deadliest form of acute malnutrition.

But the solution to closing the resource gap is not just about new donors. It’s also about how effectively we’re using the dollars that we have. At USAID, one way we’re improving our effectiveness is by strengthening our partnership with local actors, from affected communities, and local civil society, to national disaster management agencies and the local private sector. Our forthcoming policy on localization and humanitarian assistance – which hopefully many of you have seen; it’s out for public comment right now – will lay out how we plan to achieve this in crisis contexts in the coming years.

The second issue I want to raise is climate change. In travel this summer in the Philippines, in Kenya, in Pakistan, it was incredibly evident that climate impacts are now, not some future threat. Climate change, as many in this room know, is driving new needs while exacerbating existing ones. As we’ve
seen in Pakistan, in the Horn, climate shocks like flooding and droughts call death, disease, destruction and displacement, and the people most vulnerable to climate change are often those experiencing crisis and conflict. They're also the ones that have the least access to the financing needed to prepare for and be resilient to climate change.

Right now, world leaders are in Egypt to discuss how to prepare for, mitigate, and adapt to the impacts of climate change. When I travel there next week, I plan to highlight three issues that the international community should be focused on. The first is advancing early warning and early action, which we know saves lives. Early warning ahead of Typhoon Rai in the Philippines last year meant there were a few hundred deaths – each one of them tragedies, but a vast improvement of the tens of thousands of deaths we saw from similar storms just a decade ago.

Yet, one third of the world’s population doesn’t have access to early warning. To close this gap, USAID is partnering with the World Meteorological Organization and NOAA to expand national early warning systems. We’re also investing in flexible rapid response funds to enable early action and in community-driven responses to make sure those increases in early warnings are actually reaching communities in need.

Second is supporting local communities who are on the frontlines of climate crises. The people most impacted by climate shocks must have a central role in climate planning and decision-making. Stay tuned for more of our efforts in this space, again, to make sure resources are getting to those local communities.

And third, we need to close the climate adaptation financing gap for conflict-affected communities. Far too much of adaptation financing is through government-to-government channels. We need to explore new ways for international financial institutions, the private sector, and other donors to ensure that climate financing gets to those who need it most, including those that are laboring under regimes that are belligerent or those who are living in relatively ungoverned spaces.

The last topic I want to raise is humanitarian access. Humanitarian access is widely seen to be shrinking, we heard this from Juliet, while insecurity in many humanitarian contexts is growing. Indeed, attacks on humanitarian workers continue to rise. ALNAP’s report rightly notes that humanitarians are also concerned about the impact of government-imposed restrictions, like sanctions and counterterrorism measures. Some 42 percent of respondents in 2021 said that measures prevented staff from carrying out certain activities or impeded access to areas with acute needs. This is a key priority area for the U.S. government, for USAID, and for BHA.
I’m pleased with the outcome of our efforts over the past year, including our help in securing U.S. legal authorizations and adoption of a U.N. Security Council resolution to ensure assistance continues to reach at-risk populations in Afghanistan, even while the Taliban continues to be sanctioned. We also helped push for OFAC’s simultaneous communication about humanitarian exemptions and licenses, alongside sanctions against Russia. This improvement has minimized ambiguity for our partners in Ukraine, their banks and other donors and regulators.

Going one step further, and as Secretary Blinken announced at the U.N. General Assembly just last month, the U.S. government – maybe it was six weeks ago? (Laughs.) The U.S. government is working with other Security Council members to create a standardized humanitarian carveout for actors that deliver humanitarian assistance and other activities that support basic human needs. We’re also coordinating inside the U.S. government to ensure that such humanitarian authorizations would be included across U.S. domestic sanctions programs.

Finally, USAID also supported the CSIS U.S. Multistakeholder Working Group on Financial Access, which released its report and recommendations just a couple of weeks ago. This was an important project that brought together USAID, Treasury, the State Department, U.S. regulators, NGOs, and financial institutions to identify ways to mitigate de-risking as a result of sanctions. Still more is needed in this area, and you can count on me to continue and count on BHA, USAID, and the U.S. government to continue working on these issues. There were many important themes in ALNAP’s report which I haven’t had a chance to touch on yet, but I look forward to discussing with you, Kim, and with the audience here. (Applause.)

Ms. Parker: Yes. Hmm. One thing is difficult, because it’s a 350-page report.

Ms. Flowers: I know, I know, yeah.
Ms. Parker: But, yeah, I mean, there’s definitely a few things. And as you – I come from an operational background, and I just joined ALNAP a couple of years ago. And actually, that privilege of having the space to think back and reflect, which – you know, you realize that most of the humanitarian sector don’t have that space to reflect and learn. We’re a very delivery-oriented sector. And we always, when we’re producing this report, feel slightly anxious that we’re not going to have anything new to say. (Laughs.) Because, you know, have things actually changed since that last report, or not?

But actually, each report definitely represents a different stage of evolution of the sector. So the last – the previous report was much more around, you know, the coming together of multiple stakeholders for policy commitments and policy frameworks, like the World Humanitarian Summit, and the grand bargain, et cetera. And this report really – this period is really much more about the realization of how difficult it is to implement those commitments, particularly when you have a very complex operating environment, like we have had over the last few years.

I think there’s a couple of things that really stuck out for me in the report. One is this issue of the concentration of resources from and to very few players, which is stark contrast to the decolonization discussions that are kind of gaining momentum within the sector, which is all about a more diverse and inclusive sector. And that’s really at odds. And the fact that that trend is continuing doesn’t appear to be what the sector wants, and yet that’s the direction we’re heading.

The other one that I want to pick up on, which was in my presentation, was the issue of the 73 percent of aid recipients who feel that they are treated with dignity and respect. Which is really positive. Obviously, we want it be 100 percent, but it feels very positive. But it was higher than I expected, given that we are so self-critical about the levels of participation and engagement that we manage to achieve. And that was borne out in our assessment as well. And I think that that kind of – that also suggests to us that there’s quite a lot that we don’t understand about how aid recipients feel about our engagement with them, and that issues of dignity and respect are actually quite complex concepts.

Ms. Flowers: Mmm hmm. And, Sarah, as you look at the report, for you and your colleagues what are some of the themes or things that you rely on as you look at this data as you look through what policy changes or ways that the U.S. government can do work better?

Ms. Charles: Yeah. I mean, first of all, again, huge thank you to Juliet, you and the team that put this report together. I think it is invaluable to have organizations like ALNAP that are able to step back, are able to do objective comparisons
over time, are able to provide us with kind of benchmarks to start to think about progress and really put real data behind it. I mean, we are still diving into this report across BHA, but we take the findings very seriously. And, you know, one of them that sticks out to me as the – you know, at least as a matter of percentage, if not – if not top-line figures – we really haven’t made the progress on localization that I think we would all like to see. And this is something that we’ve really been digging in on at BHA over the last many years, but I’d say aggressively over the last year, year and a half.

And in digging in on our own practice, I think we’ve found a couple of things. And I really do hope people take a look at the localization policy that’s out for comment right now. One is this kind of work really requires a different kind of donor model. And it is very staff-dependent of the donor side. And it’s something I hear a lot from my fellow donors. I’m actually more optimistic about us in the U.S. government being able to make progress on this space, because we do have a model of having a lot of U.S. government officials in country that can do the hard work of working with local partners to bring them on as real partners, not contractors.

But we’re – you know, for example, we’ve had a real – a big push this past year in DRC to, you know, really try and move the ball on how many local partners, how much funding is going through local partners there. And it’s been a real eye-opener in some of the bureaucratic constraints that we’ve put in place over the years to actually moving funding. We have brought on three new local partners in DRC as direct beneficiaries of our assistance, with more coming in the coming months.

But it’s just one example of, you know, we have the policy framework that’s out right now, but we’re also undertaking really a revision of our award processes and our award guidance with a real focus on simplification and moving resources directly to local partners, and that.

Ms. Flowers: Yeah. I mean, because the localization conversation, it isn’t new, right? I mean, it may be a higher focus, and – but I was – you know, when you said this conversation is still ongoing, I was thinking I feel like we’ve been talking about this for a long time. And it’s hopeful to hear, you know, that there is some headway. But it’s hard to be a partner for the U.S. government because of all the, like, rightful, you know, regulations in place when you’re using U.S. tax dollars. Anything else that you want to speak to in terms of localization, whether it’s getting funding directly from the U.S. government or other donors? Anything else in terms of what local partners face or what they could do, you know, better to continue to ramp up localization efforts? Anything more we want to add to that conversation?

Ms. Charles: I mean, maybe I’d just add, beyond what we’re doing to try and move bilateral funds directly to local partners, I mean, I think there has been
progress on things like country-based pooled funds, which have proved that – you know, particularly again for donors that don’t necessarily have the manpower to do a lot of direct awards, a good mechanism for channeling funds to local partners. But, like many of these things – like anticipatory action, like localization, it’s about scale as well as intention.

Ms. Parker: Yeah, we’ve been – at ALNAP, we’ve been doing quite a lot of work this year also on trying to understand better how and when the humanitarian sector learns and changes. And when it doesn’t, to try and really understand, you know, what we can see from the State of Humanitarian System Report where we’re making progress, but why? Why is it that some things are taking off and other things aren’t? And what we found is that there’s kind of two camps.

There’s the technical sector-specific initiatives, where you can see a beautiful learning trajectory over time. Where there’s sector is getting better and better. You know, things treatment of malnutrition, health – you know, all these sorts of things. And it comes out in the State of Humanitarian System Report. But there are these intractable learning challenges where we’re stuck. And it’s basically accountability to affected populations, localization, and linking relief and development where, if you look back on the evaluations of 20 years ago, you can find that the recommendations are, almost word for word, the same.

So we’re stuck on these – on these particular – they’re cross-cutting, and they require collective action. And they also require a fundamental shift and rethink about the power balances within the sector. And it’s really difficult to do. And we’re kind of stuck on them, which is why – you know, there’s – you know, we noted within the State of Humanitarian System Report the narrative is getting stronger around localization. The assumption that it’s a good thing, that needs to happen, is getting stronger. And the commitments to it are getting stronger and stronger, which is an important part of the shift.

But it’s not the same as working out and what the – what the answer is. But I think the country-based pooled funds is a really excellent potential. And we can see where it’s working well, it’s working really well. But there are plenty of – there’s plenty of criticism of it as well, from the local actors in particular. (Laughs.) So it’s not magic bullet, but it does give one example. But we need more space for this experimentation, and also to recognize that localization doesn’t fit well with the incentive structures of our sector.

And that’s one of the challenges that is actually – it needs us to shift the incentive structures, particularly for the international actors, in order to actually create that shift. And that’s why the – you know, the stuff that BHA
are doing on localization is excellent. It’s pushing the agenda. It’s pushing the agenda. But we need to – you know, it’s never going to be an easy fix.

Ms. Flowers: Yeah. And you brought up, you know, the power balance. I mean, certainly it’s, again, also nothing new for the United States to be such a leader in this. But the percentage – I mean, when you were talking about up to, what 45 percent, as far as the primary donor. I mean, that is –

Ms. Charles: Fiscal year is not – the fiscal year for some of fellow donors isn’t over. So I’m hoping in the last – (laughter) – six, eight weeks, we’ll see some moves from fellow donors. But right now, that’s what it looks like.

Ms. Flowers: Yeah. And you said in your remarks, it’s unsustainable, you know? And so for a lot of audience members here, particularly those online, you know, we have a lot of people that work within the U.S. government, whether it’s Congress or, you know, for the donor. You know, what is – you know, for them what should they be thinking through in terms of how do we really shift this too? Because we obviously – not just a moral obligation. We’re a great leader in this space. We want to continue to be a great leader in this space. But how do you really shift that dynamic? I’ll look to you first in terms of, like, what do you do to really try to engage more of not just the nontraditional donors, like the philanthropic and the diaspora which is also important, but what about other countries that really need to step up to the plate, or who are pulling back?

Ms. Charles: Yeah, and I would say, you know, one thing that’s driving that difference in the report between the U.S. having maybe 30 percent of the share to, this year, probably having more like 40-plus percent of that share, is I think we’ve had tremendous bipartisan support in Congress over the last couple of years that has recognized the humanitarian imperative. And even with – there’s been a lot of attention on kind of the distraction of the Ukraine conflict, and how it’s diverted resources from other crises. I think that’s the case for most – around most of the world. It’s not the case for the U.S. government.

I mean there actually has been a tail, so to speak, on Ukraine supplemental funding. The Congress recognized that there was a global impact of Russia’s war on Ukraine, and so it provided $4.3 billion in additional, funding really geared towards responding in the rest of the world to this crisis. So I think we’ve – you know, we’ve seen a generosity from the U.S. Congress. We’ve seen – we’ve seen that move beyond just a Ukraine-focused response to really be global in nature. But as I look around the world at other donors, we’re seeing a very different dynamic.
And I actually think one of the stories of maybe not that period that ends in 2021, but 2022 and 2023 is it’s not just the retreat of the nontraditional donors, which we’ve seen over the last couple of years, but the retreat of some of the traditional donors. Obviously, the kind of step-back of FCDO being the most dramatic.

Ms. Flowers: Can you explain what that means?

Ms. Charles: Oh, the U.K. government’s kind of walk-away from their 0.7 commitments has been the most dramatic and what we felt kind of around the world, and particularly in the Horn, I’d say, where they were such a catalytic donor during the last drought in 2016-2017. But also we’re seeing even Nordic donors, who’ve been such stalwarts, you know, looking at reductions in the coming years. So again, I think there’s an imperative for us to look – one, to continue working these kind of traditional and nontraditional donors, making the case for humanitarian action.

But also, you know, again, looking at – when I look at humanitarian needs, there’s a lot in there that wasn’t in there a decade, 15-20 years ago. And it reflects what you’ve been talking about in terms of these are protracted crises, and people’s needs move beyond life-saving assistance. And so, you know, looking at new models for how do we provide for social safety nets in crisis? How do we – how do we look to – how do we look to other actors to support sustained basic service delivery? When I talked to our team about the Horn, I’m talking to them much, I’m talking as much to counterparts at the banks, as I am to fellow donors. Because what we need is more shock-resistant social safety net investments, not just kind of quote, “humanitarian investments.”

Ms. Flowers: Is there you want to add to that? As well as I want to ask you if for – especially I’m thinking of congressional staffers who may be online watching this today – what should they be paying attention to? If they don’t know – they haven’t been working deep in the humanitarian sector, what should they be – what’s the one key issue they should be thinking about for, maybe, a brief they have to write for someone in Congress?

Ms. Parker: Well, maybe I can build on a couple of Sarah’s points as well.

Ms. Flowers: Sure.

Ms. Parker: I mean, one of the great things about the U.S. being such a significant donor is that, actually, they have – they play a massive role in the in the formation, and the well-functioning, and the future, you know, performance of the sector. So, where the U.S. decides to prioritize and lead on something, it has a huge influence for change within the sector, which is massively positive. And we see lots of good examples. Localization is a good example.
Anticipatory action is another good example, for example. But the dependence on few actors also makes the sector very vulnerable. Which becomes a cause for concern because, great when things are going well, but when things aren't going so well, actually, it can be massively negatively impactful for the sector, which is really important.

Also, Sarah touched on this issue about – I mean, and I mentioned in my presentation, the ambition of the humanitarian sector is also growing. So we know that the humanitarian sector delivers response programing very well. And that there’s good evidence of effectiveness there. But actually, the mandate of the humanitarian sector is growing, and the longer-term nature of crises – recurrent crises requires much more focus on longer-term community resilience and recovery programming. And there’s a question about where it sits, you know? And that’s where, you know, the humanitarian development peace nexus is really important.

But our findings were that people at the project level or program level, they don’t get it. Like, it’s not resonating as a concept. It’s not enabling them to create better linkages. And also, like our conversations with some of the development actors when we’re preparing this report, demonstrated that it’s not obvious to them that they need to step into that space. So we kind of – you know, we’re stuck with this lost ground, the no-man’s land between humanitarian and development. And it’s not obvious that we’ll be able to resource it or, you know, that anybody else will necessarily step into that space.

In terms of – and then I forgot your question. (Laughs.)

Ms. Flowers: Oh, I was thinking about, like, a congressional staffer who might be watching online, who doesn’t know a lot about the humanitarian space. You know, but they have to think about what what’s important to their – you know, the number of Congress that they work for. What should members of Congress be paying attention to? You know, they’re not going to read the whole report. So what’s the few things that they should, you know, yeah, pay attention to?

Ms. Parker: So, I mean, localization is definitely one that comes up all the way through the report. I think anticipatory action is also this other one. You know, we know that timeliness makes a difference. And now we have to a growing body of evidence, you know, not everybody thinks we needed the evidence because it seemed obvious to many, but evidence that actually that also improves the effectiveness of programming. And then these missed opportunities when it isn’t working – like, you know, East Africa is a heartbreaking example now. Like, why, with everything that we know, with the cyclical nature of these
crises, why? Why isn’t it automatic that everything should kick in just in the right way with all this learning? And we have plenty of learning. Learning is not the blockage with these sorts of crises. And I think that's a really important point that comes out quite strongly.

Ms. Flowers: Yeah. I’d like to turn to the audience in person first to get some of your questions. I think we have some microphone runners that will be at the back. I’ll also, of course, turn to some questions that have been submitted online. But if you just want to raise your hand if you have a question in the audience. I’ll take three at a time. Oh, don’t be shy, now. Here we go. Let’s do one. Yeah, right there is fine. Then we’ll come to the one in the front.

Can you stand up, please? And can you just give your name and affiliation? Thank you.

Q: Thank you very much. I’m Leon Weintraub, a retired member of the U.S. Foreign Service.

You were just speaking about what should congressional staffers know to report to the principals they’re working for. I think the keyword some of you mentioned was accountability. I know, from my experience in government, there’s a lot of paperwork involved in accountability. And sometimes there are different standards of accountability. I wonder, has there given – been given much thought to development of common accountability standards and regulations? So in reports that have to be filed to satisfy USAID and the Congress, the United Nations, the EU, Germany, Japan, the other donors. Has there been any thought about trying to develop a common standard of accountability so one report from a recipient agency could satisfy a lot of donors?

Ms. Flowers: Great. Thank you so much. Other questions? OK, oh, sorry. Go right ahead. Right in the back, if you can see right over there there’s a woman. Yeah, she’s coming. Go ahead, sir.

Q: I’m Bob Hershey. I’m a consultant.

To what extent can you bring in the internet to hold meetings virtually with the local people and the donors to get their participation and get an economic consensus of what they want to do on each project?

Ms. Flowers: OK. Great. Thank you. And in the very back here, and then we’ll turn to our speakers next. Go ahead, please.

Q: I’m Meghan Lopez with Global Support and Development.
So I have a question. I think it was really interesting, the point that you made that the humanitarian sector is good at response programming. And I wonder if you could talk a little bit more about that, because I wonder are we actually good at that, or is it just easier to measure? And is it not, perhaps, that by not addressing localization that we sort of perpetuate that myth, that that’s something that we’re good at? And then related to that, how do we see the role, if we think about everyone in this room, or going back to your question about the U.S. congressional staffers, what role do we see ticking towards looking at the solutions that are out there and have been talked about for some time? Whether we’re talking about grand bargain, or pledge for change, or a lot of the efforts that have come out of the Global South? Thanks.

Ms. Flowers: Thank you so much. Sarah, we’ll start with you. Respond as you wish to those questions.

Ms. Charles: Yeah, well, maybe first on the promise of the internet. I mean, I think a lot of challenges came out of the COVID experience, of course. But one of them was – as if there needed to be a more evidence, and I don’t think there did to convince us – it really was an opportunity to shine a spotlight on just the critical role of local responders in these crises, in a time when travel restrictions kind of shook up the humanitarian response model. And it’s also allowed, you know, I would say, much easier, in some ways, consultation with, engagement with, work with local partners. And, in fact, as we’ve brought on more local partners in DRC, we’ve been able to do a lot more – take advantage a lot more of bringing, kind of, Washington to DRC to help work through those very complicated processes with local partners, even while we try to make our processes less complicated.

And on that point, in terms of accountability, I mean, I think one of the reasons why our award making has become so cumbersome – one of the barriers to kind of moving resources to local partners is that, you know, every time there’s an OIG report, we add more reporting requirement, more due diligence, more restrictions. And that’s for very good reason. But one thing we’re doing inside BHA right now is taking a hard look at which of these processes and procedures provide value, actually help mitigate risk, and which are just barriers to entry.

And how do we rationalize and simplify that? Because we both need to be accountable – I think we all in this sector want to make sure assistance is getting where it’s intended to go and that we’re able to demonstrate that, monitor that. But we also – we also know that many of the kind of policies that have piled up over the years are probably not serving their intended purpose anymore. So it’s a big part of us trying to rationalize it.
And then, you know, the question of we’re good at response. I mean, I think we can be—we can be self-critical. I think that’s a really healthy aspect of the humanitarian system, that we really are made-up of individuals that are quite good at questioning, probing, trying to improve the sector. And recognize areas where there has been tremendous progress. I mean, I think the shift to—the shift to cash, we hear time and time again from people, is responsive to what they—what they want. I think we have seen real, measurable, concrete improvements in the ability for communities to sustain, to survive, and recover from sudden onset disasters. And that really is because of, you know, improvements in the way that we work. And like Juliet said, I think there have been, you know, real improvements delivery of things like malnutrition treatment, which is not to say we don’t need to, again, hold ourselves accountable and continue to make real progress on accountability to affected populations and on localization.

Ms. Flowers: Would you like to respond to any of those questions?

Ms. Parker: Well, I think Sarah addressed them all very well. So just a couple of things to add, I suppose.

I think the issue of pooled due diligence processes is a really interesting one. And there are some small pilots happening where, you know, if a local organization has submitted its compliance and due diligence and accountability processes for one agency or one donor, they can be used by others. But they are a very small number of pilots, given that it’s so often quoted as a barrier to entry into the system by local actors. And it’s because, you know, the sectors faces these dual accountabilities that they just can’t manage to match. But there is—I mean, certainly from the donors that I hear from, there’s a commitment to try and find better ways of doing things. But the pilots are currently still very small.

I think, yeah, the good at response programming or is it easier to measure, is a great question. And the reality is, from covering the State of the Humanitarian Systems Reports over the last 12-15 years, is that the humanitarian system is now providing aid effectively to more people in more complex environments than it ever has before. So if that’s a metric of success, it’s doing it well. I think that issue is it easier to measure is really interesting, because going through this process of compiling the report, there—you know, it’s extremely frustrating—(laughs)—the number of things that we can’t look at, can’t establish, and can’t say because as a sector we’re not good enough collecting their meaningful data, or sometimes sharing that data is also a challenge. (Laughs.)
And we have a lot of goodwill behind this report and we access an amazing amount of data, but there's still lots that we can't access, which really compromises the sector's overall ability to know how it's doing.

Ms. Flowers: Can you give an example of that? Like, what's some of the data that you would love to have, that you don't have? (Laughter.) I don't know, maybe that's too broad.

Ms. Parker: (Laughs.) Can I suggest that if people would like to talk about that, they talk to Alice, who's the report author, after?

Ms. Flowers: Sure. Alice, raise your hand. During the coffee break, talk to Alice. I will be. (Laughter.) OK, go ahead.

Ms. Parker: Yes, because it's really complicated. (Laughs.) Yeah. And I think that—well, and cash is the other excellent example. We've seen cash increase from 14 percent to 20 percent, with really strong outcome measurements, really strong effectiveness measurements. And the question for the sector is, you know, do you keep progressing, that knowing that it makes such a huge difference?

Ms. Flowers: Yeah. There's a few questions from online that I that I want to get to. One is for you, Juliet, and then the other, I think, I think can be both. This one is, can you share—you know, your slide talking about how 40 percent of the funding was from “other.” What percentage of that would come from China? Do you know that? Is that maybe too specific?

Ms. Parker: Oh, that's probably too specific, but I highly recommend you read the report. (Laughter.)

Ms. Flowers: Well, that gives a good answer in and of itself.

Ms. Charles: It's clear it's tiny.

Ms. Flowers: That's what I figured, yes.

Ms. Charles: It's tiny, tiny, tiny. We really tried to dig into this. (Laughs.) And it is almost negligible.

Ms. Flowers: Got it. OK. That gives me a good answer.

And this is a question for both of you. I know it's hard to say, like, what the next ALNAP report would look like. However, looking at the current trends, you know, again it's impossible to pull out a crystal ball and just project this. But what are you seeing in the trends right now of what you expect us to be
in terms of where we're going be doing well or not so well in the next five years? What do you think, and what do you think?

Sarah first on that.

Ms. Charles:

Wow, crystal ball. A couple of – maybe a couple of – a couple of issues. One, I think we were talking in the green room about return of the middle-income countries on the list. I spent set this summer in the Horn and in Kenya and Somalia, in the Philippines, in Pakistan. And you add places like Kenya, Pakistan, Lebanon, Sri Lanka – these are countries that we didn't think about as – I mean, Lebanon is a refugee hosting country – but, you know, even five, six years ago these weren't countries where we were thinking about significant humanitarian needs. And they're very much back on the list, and they're back on the list not because of issues of capacity, but because of issues of either governance, or issues of financing, and issues of just the overwhelming impact of climate, particularly in the cases of Kenya and Pakistan. So I think certainly climate is going to loom even larger than it did in this report.

And then the other thing I would say is, you know, we've been talking a lot about financing, the share of financing. I've been talking about the retreat of nontraditional and traditional donors. But even within that retreat, I think there is a recognition that the humanitarian needs are significant, and a desire to protect humanitarian budgets inside of broader budget cuts. We're seeing this from – we're seeing this with FCDO, with the with the U.K. government. We’re seeing this with some of my Nordic counterparts. But I think we're going to feel the cost of that down the road. Because what's getting cut is development budgets. And as much as there's still a lot of work to be done in the nexus, there are places – and we know that those resilience investments, those ag investments, those investments in climate-smart infrastructure, that they are so related to the humanitarian needs down the road.

And so while there's – you know, part of me when I talk to my counterparts and they say things like, well, our humanitarian budgets won't be that impacted. It's really going to come from the development side of the house. You know, it's, like, OK, that makes some of my calculation in the very near term a little bit easier, but I see the looming cost of that walk-back from development investments that we'll be feeling for, you know, decades to come.

Ms. Flowers:

Yeah. What are the current trends that you're seeing, and what do you think for –
Ms. Parker: Well, I think the climate change one is obviously very significant. And I think one of the interesting things, from a kind of learning and performance point of view, is actually one of the implications of the climate change stuff is that the humanitarian sector is going to have to get faster at adapting. Because actually what we've seen is that the humanitarian sector's ability to learn and evolve over time is comparatively slow and incremental. But actually, the reality of climate change is the unpredictable nature of the crises we'll be facing will mean that we need to be able to process and act on data much quicker, and on real-time learning, and all those sorts of processes, to be able to be flexible and adaptable enough to respond to these new types of crises.

The other thing that I want to pick up, which Sarah did mention earlier, is also access. Yeah, that's one of the really worrying trends that has gone on, you know, beyond just this reporting period, is around humanitarian space and access. And that's been a long-term trend which we may reasonably expect to become more challenging in this next reporting period, and really compromising the ability of the humanitarian sector to deliver assistance. And I think one of the challenges to that is that the – you know, a lot of the solution to that sits outside of the humanitarian sector. And it requires, you know, leadership and unity from the international community, without which we're going to continue to see this erosion of humanitarian norms and space.

Ms. Flowers: Mmm hmm. There's a question that actually ties in directly to what we're talking about from online. And it says – it says the question is for Sarah, but I think either of you might answer it. But it says: You highlighted the need to support adaptation efforts for community most affected by climate change. So what is USAID's position on providing funding for loss and damage to help communities affected by climate change recover and rebuild?

Ms. Charles: So, I will say USAID's position is really the U.S. government position on this, which is our dual focus is really on mitigation. So bringing down emissions, working around the world to bring down – bring down emissions, and also significantly increasing our investments in adaptation. So this was announced last year, the president's emergency plan for climate change, called PREPARE, which really is focused on increasing trying to reach 500 million of the most vulnerable over the next several years, with adaptation, resources. Again, focused on getting these resources to those that are most likely to be impacted by the worst impacts of climate change. And USAID and BHA are a big part of that adaptation work. And BHA in particular, at models for moving resources not just through kind of government systems, but at a very local level to help communities think about, make decisions, and prepare for climate impacts.

Ms. Flowers: Yeah. Anything you want to add? No?
Let's take one or two final questions from the audience. Hareem, there's a woman in a green jacket right there. OK. I see you over there. Let's come all the way to this side. OK, go ahead.

Q: Hi. I'm Marie-Rose Romain Murphy from the Haiti Community Foundation.

I have a question in terms of accountability and, actually, evaluation. Is there any question or any section when it comes to grantees that's related to accountability to communities? And if there isn't, how do you measure the progress on localization? So that's one. The other thing is, I actually read a summary of the annual report. And actually, I was interviewed – I was one of the people interviewed for it. And my understanding is, like, there was actually in terms of funding to local actors, it went down to 1.2 percent. OK, I still haven't been able to swallow that. But at any rate, and I have to ask why? Because one of the things that I worry about is some of these numbers.

I worry about, for example, when we talk about cash is – and cash is good. Don't get me wrong. Better cash than having goods coming and disrupting economies, and with extremely low procurement levels when it comes to the growth of local economies, and increasing dependence on aid which, as we know, doesn't help. But then when you scratch, you start seeing that basically as far as localization or in terms of local actors', Global South actors’ control, you have more and more sort of U.N. agencies and INGOs getting this cash, controlling these cash programs. So part of me is, like, does anybody see it as a problem? And if it is, is there a way of moving toward that?

And I realize it’s multiple questions, but there’s a part of me that feels like where is the accountability system to the communities? Because basically if aid is not about ending the need for aid, what are we doing? And then – and if it isn’t in there, it needs to be in there. And then the other part of it is, can we sort of scratch another surface and then see what's really going on? Because we talk about sustainability. And given the climate change and everything that's going on, it is completely unrealistic that people do not have a full or agency’s localization agenda, which we all know that we – a lot of Global South hate that term. But whatever – for whatever it is, we’re stuck with it for now.

Ms. Flowers: Thank you very much. Question over here. And then we only have time for one more question, and we’ll go to the back right over here. Go ahead.

Q: Hello. Good morning. Maurice Ruggeri from Italy. I work for NATO.
My question is about the future trends besides climate security also regarding refugees, because of the demographic bomb in Africa, particularly in the Mediterranean. If you see also the need of increasing cooperation between civilian and military actors? Meaning that in NATO, at least, we see that in the trends in the future, that it will increase these humanitarian missions, military missions that we need, maybe in cooperation with the civilian actors. Thank you very much.

Ms. Flowers: Thank you so much. We’ll go ahead and just bring the microphone right over there to the woman at the back. Thank you so much. We’ll have to do lightning answers, but we’ll get to it.

Q: Thank you. Thank you so much. I’m Stanislava with the Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Studies at Brown.

Just to add onto my NATO colleague’s question and your interaction with militaries, you mentioned access, climate change, increasing conflict. How has the increasing nexus between development and humanitarian assistance changed the sector’s relationship not just with militaries, but private security companies, local police, international and host-nation militaries? Thank you.

Ms. Flowers: Great. Thank you so much. Who would like to begin? That was a lot to cover.

Ms. Parker: Could I pick up on the localization one?

Ms. Flowers: Yes. Yes.

Ms. Parker: Because I think – I mean, I think it’s a brilliant question. And it’s really – localization is clearly really problematic. The sectors say they want it. They believe it will make the sector better and stronger. They believe it’ll, you know, improve the quality of assistance. But –

Ms. Flowers: But, yet, what was it, 1.2 percent?

Ms. Parker: Yeah, the overall proportion – and I think that’s an issue of the incentive structures and the way that our sector is structured. So we’ve done this kind of learning piece that’s coming out in a few weeks to try and understand why the learning has progressed in some areas and not others, that I mentioned earlier. And one of those I think is around incentives. Incentives for the sector to change and the actors within the sector to change.

What we can see with localization is these bubbling learning and adaptation and change happening at the project level, but as it starts to coalesce it hits
what we call the institutional permafrost across the middle of the sector, which is basically our international institutions, who actually are somewhat resistant or unable to change and adapt. And that we don’t actually have the incentive structures in places in order to enable that change that we want because localization is complex, it means relinquishing power, it means changing the way that we’re doing things.

And when you link it to kind of evaluation and stuff, I mean, one of the things that we know is that international institutions get better and better at proving why what they’re doing is good. (Laughs.) And so, you know, the sector will quickly find ways to look more localized, without necessarily addressing those fundamental shifts that are required. And that’s difficult within institutions. The institutions are battling and grappling with that at an individual institution level, as well as collectively.

Ms. Flowers: Mmm hmm. Great. Thank you. Sarah, final thoughts as well as reactions to some of the questions?

Ms. Charles: Sure. Maybe I’ll – a couple of reactions. One on the question of kind of engaging with private security, military actors, militias and others. Certainly one of the themes – I mean, access means so many different things, it’s very difficult to unpack. But one of the themes in so many of the places that we’re supporting partners to work is a need for much more technical expertise, presence on the ground, and tactical engagement with armed actors. And it’s one of our top priorities with OCHA is to expand their kind of civil-military capabilities. It’s also we have a partnership with NRC to help support and train NGOs on how to engage at that very tactical level with military actors. It’s, of course, kind of a growing trend.

I think this question about the tension between the move to cash and localization is such a – is such a good and rich one. One way that it’s been coming up in our engagement in a number of different setting is, you know, there are places where you have these – I don’t know if this is exactly what you had in mind – but where you have these national social safety net programs, and we have humanitarian multipurpose cash existing alongside or in the same places. And in some places, there are very good reasons for that.

In other places, we’re really pressing our partners, pressing on the humanitarian country team to articulate and distinguish between, you know, what should and could be going through humanitarian systems, and what we really should be supporting national and local system responses too. And that goes back to kind of this conversation that needs to be much more systematic between, you know, the multilateral development banks – again, in a place like Somalia or Ukraine, where there are these kind of existing
government systems – and where that kind of very targeted humanitarian cash could or should be used.

But, you know, I also – I also hear you on the percentage of funding moving to local actors is a huge – you know, I think a black eye on the system. And it’s one of the reasons, again, why we’re so focused not on kind of policies out on the street, we want your feedback, but not just the policy but the systems and the practice that are going to shift the movement of resources in that space. Because I think there is – you know, there is sometimes a disconnect between what we agree in theory and policy, and then building the systems that actually allow us to move the agenda forward.

Ms. Flowers:

Thank you. Thank you to all of you for being here today. I hope you stick around. You see the program, there’s going to be a lot of great discussions we’re having today. For now we’re going to take about a 10-minute break. Get some coffee, stretch your legs. Keep the conversation going with our panelists, with each other. And we’ll see you back in this room at 10:30 for the open plenary. Thank you so much. (Applause.)

(END)