

# HPG

Humanitarian  
Policy Group



## Annual Review

2015–16



# About HPG

The Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) is one of the world’s leading independent research teams working on humanitarian issues.

## Events



31

## Publications



68

## Staff members



18

We are dedicated to improving humanitarian policy and practice through a combination of high-quality research, dialogue and debate.

Our work is directed by our Integrated Programme (IP), a body of research examining critical issues facing humanitarian policy and practice, designed in consultation with our Advisory Group. This is complemented by commissioned studies, evaluations and communications, and networking activities.

Grounded in field research spanning a range of countries and emergencies, IP projects allow us to cast a critical eye over the pressing issues affecting humanitarian policy and practice and to set the agenda on key debates in the sector.

Our research focuses on five cross-cutting themes:

- Principles, politics and the humanitarian system
- Civilian security and protection
- Livelihoods and food security in crises
- Displacement, urbanisation and migration
- Protracted crises and transitions

We host the Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN), an independent forum for humanitarian practitioners to share and disseminate information and experience.

Learning and academic engagement are critical areas of our work. We edit and produce *Disasters* journal, and run courses for senior policy-makers and practitioners in the sector.

We offer consultancy services, policy advice and commissioned studies relating to HPG’s aims and objectives.

Communications and public affairs are a core part of our work, helping to promote and disseminate our research findings, encourage debate and influence perceptions and understanding of humanitarian issues amongst the wider media and public.

Our donors provide the funding that enables us to pursue IP research.

This Annual Review documents the highlights of our work from April 2015–March 2016.

For more information, visit us at [www.odi.org/hpg](http://www.odi.org/hpg).

Previous page: South Sudanese refugees in Elegu, Uganda. © UNHCR/Will Swanson.



# A new global humanitarianism

Despite a decade of reform, the humanitarian sector is still falling short in its response to the world's most challenging crises.

The humanitarian system is struggling to keep pace with the growing demands of more frequent and more enduring crises, the changing character of conflict and the increasingly crowded arena in which it operates.

Over the past year, our research, policy engagement and public affairs have sought to analyse and address the challenges facing humanitarian action today. We've reflected on key issues at the World Humanitarian Summit, dissected the systemic obstacles to change, made the case for innovation and new models of aid, and deepened our engagement with humanitarian actors outside the formal system.

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Opposite: Children play football on a street in Baba Amr, Homs, Syria.  
© UNHCR/Andrew McConnell.





## HPG and the World Humanitarian Summit

Our research and convening power played a key role in shaping the conversation around the World Humanitarian Summit, helping to inform the perspectives, positions and commitments of governments, UN agencies and humanitarian organisations.

Ahead of the Summit we provided analytical support for the regional consultations and thematic groups, and published analysis of key issues on the agenda, what the Summit should deliver and its likely outcomes.

At the Summit, we showcased some of our core initiatives and research, with an event on cash programming and a high-level special session launching the Regional Organisations Humanitarian Action Network (ROHAN), featuring a senior panel of leaders from 12 regional organisations. Our active support for ROHAN has reaffirmed the place of regional organisations in humanitarian response.

By bringing regional organisations together, ROHAN has created opportunities, both for stronger advocacy

on their role in the humanitarian system, and to share policy and practice and create effective mechanisms to prevent and respond to disasters and conflict.

We have influenced the formal WHS process, serving as a go-to source of expert advice for the WHS Secretariat and others, providing substantial feedback on key outputs and moderating sessions at Summit consultations. Our research on the changing humanitarian landscape also fed directly into a report by the UN Secretary-General setting the scene for the WHS.

Below: ODI Managing Director Sara Pantuliano (second from right) chairing the ROHAN session at the World Humanitarian Summit. © Oktay Cilesiz.

## A blueprint for systemic reform

Our flagship report *Time to Let Go: Remaking Humanitarian Action for the Modern Era* analysed why, despite decades of reform, humanitarian agencies are still unable to respond effectively to crises.

We pinpointed fundamental problems in power dynamics and incentive structures that are holding back change, and made the case for a more decentralised and devolved way of working.

*Time to Let Go* attracted significant attention worldwide: in the first two weeks after the launch, the report's webpage was the most viewed on the ODI site. The report was shared over 1,000 times on Facebook and its #RemakeAid hashtag reached over 60,000 accounts on Twitter. The report also received extensive media coverage, including in *The New York Times*, *The Associated Press*, *The Washington Post*, Reuters and *The Guardian*.

Our ongoing research project 'Constructive Deconstruction' is exploring the underlying political economy and institutions of the formal humanitarian sector. We're reimagining roles and architecture to enable more appropriate and effective assistance able to deal with ever-larger, longer and more complex crises.

In its meetings, events and studies, HPG leads the world in the quality of its analysis and discussion of the contemporary humanitarian scene.

Peter Gill, journalist and author





# Health crises and international aid: the case of Ebola

The Ebola crisis took the international aid system into uncharted waters. It involved new actors, required new approaches and magnified familiar shortcomings and flaws.



*The Ebola Response in West Africa: Exposing the Politics and Culture of International Aid* examined pre-existing health policies and investments in affected countries, early warning systems, the role of politics and security in the response, and the strengths and limitations of the different approaches employed by international, national and community responders.

We found enduring tensions between sovereignty and transnational responses, humanitarian and development approaches, supply- versus demand-driven programming and indigenous versus international responses.

The research stimulated debate on deep-seated flaws in how the humanitarian aid system works and what can be done to change it. It informed the Report of the High Level Panel on the Global Response to Health Crises, the policies of key donors and the thinking of the academic and public health communities around responses to pandemics and infectious diseases.

Above: A hospital in Kakata, Margibi County, Liberia. © Dominic Chavez/World Bank.  
Overleaf: Ebola Treatment Unit, N'zerekore, Guinea. © UNMEER/Martine Perret.



## Making the case for cash

We led the Secretariat for the High Level Panel on Humanitarian Cash Transfers.

Following extensive consultation, discussion and analysis, the High Level Panel on Humanitarian Cash Transfers report set out a series of far-reaching recommendations for governments, humanitarian actors and the private sector. It identified 12 crucial steps to scaling up cash transfer programmes, including capitalising on digital technology and private sector expertise and opening up cash transfer programmes to greater competition.

The report argued that making cash central to emergency response planning offers an opportunity for broader reform of the humanitarian system. It charted the next steps for donors, governments and humanitarian agencies to make these changes a reality.

The Panel's work was referenced in the Secretary-General's report for the World Humanitarian Summit and in the report of the UN High Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing. It also formed the basis for a high-profile side event on cash programming at the Summit.

## New actors through new lenses

We've deepened our engagement with 'rising' humanitarian actors.

Our research on state humanitarianism analyses what drives states' engagement in humanitarian action. In keeping with our long-standing interest in so-called 'rising' donors, we're exploring these questions in relation to China and Saudi Arabia, alongside comparative work on the UK.

In the run-up to the World Humanitarian Summit, we organised a series of conferences in key emerging donor capitals. Our conference in Beijing, co-hosted with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Chinese Academy of Governance and the Chinese Academy of Social Science, influenced the Chinese government's approach to working with the international community on shared challenges. The conference generated real excitement in China, attracting high levels of national news coverage.

A second conference, in Jakarta, was organised with the ICRC and the Humanitarian Forum. The coming year will see similar conferences in Tehran and Moscow, as well as another meeting in China to reflect on the outcomes of the World Humanitarian Summit.



## Addressing the protection gap

Following our work on the role of international and local diaspora actors in the response to the Syrian crisis, our focus on protection shifted to the conflict in the Central African Republic.

Our report on the protection crisis in the Central African Republic looked at how people affected by the conflict there see protection threats,

how they address them and what they expect from actors seeking to provide protection. This work highlighted how and why civilians look to armed groups for protection more than formal protection actors, in this instance peacekeepers, and the important role of faith groups in mediation and trust-building.

Our Syria study on international and local diaspora actors continued to generate significant interest, with HPG experts invited to public speaking engagements and bilateral briefings, including a side event at the ECOSOC humanitarian segment.

Our work on the legal framework of protection was referenced in the report of the UK parliament's International Development Committee ahead of the World Humanitarian Summit.





## Protracted displacement, livelihoods and self-reliance

Our report *Protracted Displacement: Uncertain Paths to Self-reliance in Exile* mapped and analysed protracted displacement around the world.

It assessed the impact of national policy frameworks, institutional arrangements and international assistance on improving self-reliance and livelihoods in protracted displacement and identified opportunities to promote people's livelihoods and self-reliance. Commissioned by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the study was carried out with the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC).

The report was widely cited: it had considerable uptake among donors and policy-makers, and informed discussions globally on protracted displacement and refugee crises, in particular in the run-up to the World Humanitarian Summit.

We published '10 things you need to know about displacement' to highlight key trends and figures and make them more accessible, including to the general public. The collection of infographics has proved extremely popular, with almost 2,500 downloads since its launch.

We are also working on a two-year research project on displaced people's livelihoods in Malaysia, Cameroon and countries neighbouring Syria, analysing the perspectives of refugees living outside camps, the strategies they employ and the opportunities open to agencies to support them.

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Left: Somali refugees, Dadaab refugee camp, Kenya.  
© Brendan Bannon/IOM/UNHCR.



A Rohingya refugee from Myanmar in a centre in Kuala Langsa, Aceh, Indonesia.  
© UNHCR/Fauzan Ijazah.



# Reducing disaster risk

The average annual death toll from disasters in the decade between 2003 and 2012 was almost 110,000; the average annual number affected was 216 million, and average annual losses were \$157 billion.



Lasting protection against disasters is a long-term goal to be achieved through a continuous process of improvement, with lessons learnt and shared. We published a new edition of Good Practice Review 9 on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR).

Thoroughly revised and updated since it was first published ten years ago, the Good Practice Review identifies and discusses the principles and practice of DRR. Drawing on experiences from around the world, it emphasises

the practical process of planning and implementing risk reduction initiatives, looking at key issues and decision points. Extensive case studies demonstrate the range and diversity of practical approaches that can be used.

In addition to developing a dedicated interactive microsite for the book, HPG commissioned an animated whiteboard video on ‘10 things you need to know about DRR’, which was viewed more than 7,000 times in its first five weeks online.

Above: A boy steps on cinderblocks to avoid floodwater, Avedji Village, Benin. © UNICEF/UNI96737/Asselin.



# Our global reach

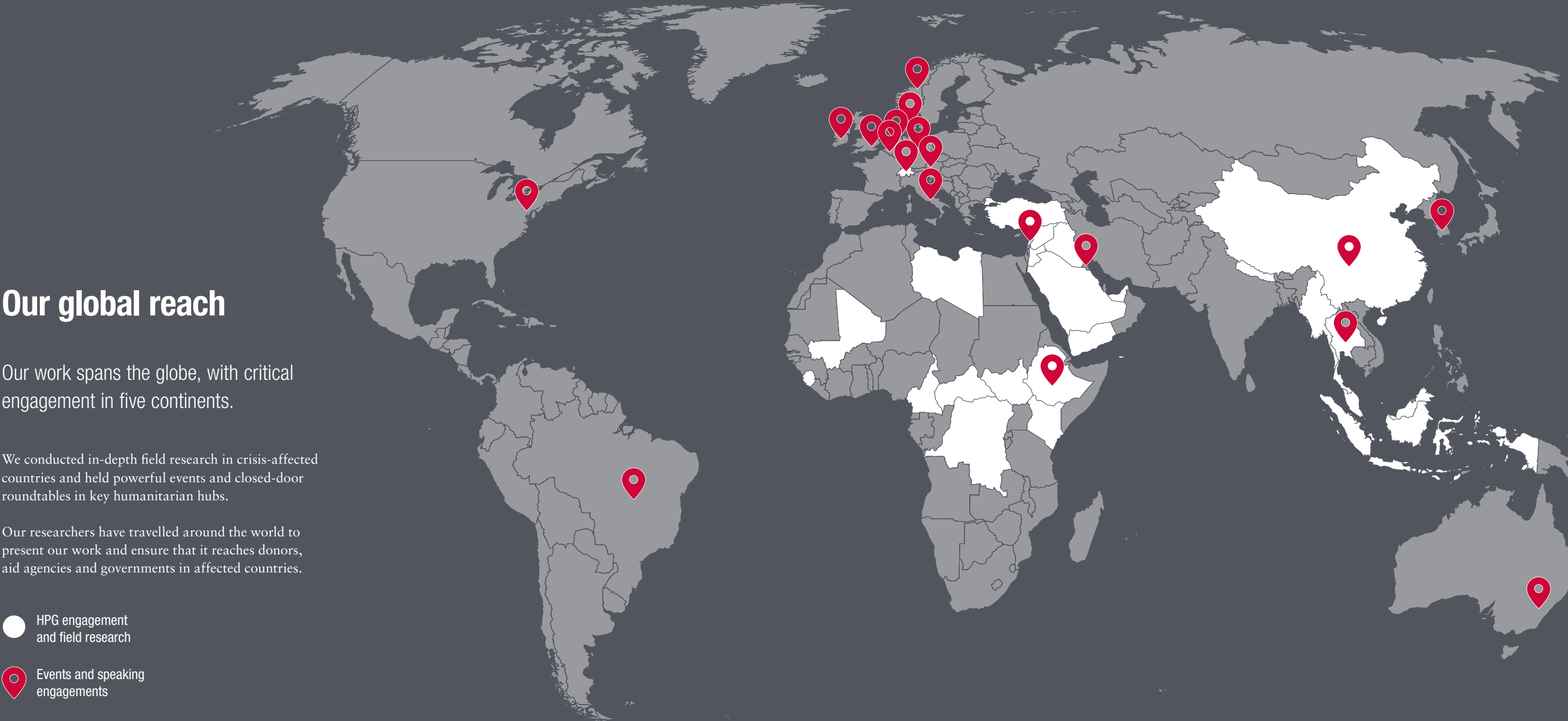
Our work spans the globe, with critical engagement in five continents.

We conducted in-depth field research in crisis-affected countries and held powerful events and closed-door roundtables in key humanitarian hubs.

Our researchers have travelled around the world to present our work and ensure that it reaches donors, aid agencies and governments in affected countries.

● HPG engagement and field research

📍 Events and speaking engagements





# Engaging with practitioners and academia

## Humanitarian Practice Network

The Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN), managed by HPG, is a forum for policy-makers, practitioners and others working in the humanitarian sector to share, disseminate and learn from information, analysis and experience. HPN produces specialist resources – written for and by practitioners – and facilitates dialogue and debate through regular public and closed-door events.

Over the past year HPN released three issues of *Humanitarian Exchange* magazine focusing on the response to the Ebola crisis, the crisis in Iraq and innovation in humanitarian action, as well as a revised edition of Good Practice Review 9 on Disaster Risk Reduction (see p. 13). We also published a steady stream of online blogs and articles; highlights include a letter of advice to the new Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O’Brien, and an article on the implications of the ‘Dennis vs. Norwegian Refugee Council’ case for duty of care regarding humanitarian workers, both of which attracted significant media attention and online debate.

A complementary range of partner events with HPN members included a launch event for the *Humanitarian Exchange* on Iraq, which was moderated by the BBC’s Security Correspondent Frank Gardner and included Lise Grande, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq.

## Senior-Level Course on Conflict and Humanitarian Response

After a successful five-year relationship with the Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development Unit (PRDU) at the University of York, we partnered with the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) to offer a new annual senior-level course on Conflict and Humanitarian Response. The course provides an opportunity for mid-career and senior professionals in the sector to learn and reflect on critical issues in humanitarian response.

In 2015 the course attracted senior UN and NGO officials and donor representatives with extensive humanitarian experience, many working on today’s most complex crises, including Syria, Iraq and Somalia.

We have also maintained our ties with a range of academic institutions, including the Chinese Academy of Governance and the Chinese Academy of Social Science.

## Disasters journal

We manage *Disasters*, a leading peer-reviewed quarterly journal, with articles relating to all aspects of complex emergencies and natural disasters.

In addition to the quarterly editions, this year *Disasters* published a special issue on the history of humanitarian action, guest-edited by the Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute at the University of Manchester and the Humanitarian Innovation Fund, and a virtual issue on disaster recovery.

## Keep up to date with HPG

### E-newsletter

Our e-newsletter has all the latest information on our work, from publications to meetings.

Sign up online at [www.odi.org/hpg](http://www.odi.org/hpg) or send an email to [hpgadmin@odi.org](mailto:hpgadmin@odi.org).

### Annual Report

This Annual Review captures the highlights of our work. For a full look at all our work over the year, read the HPG Annual Report 2015–16 at [www.odi.org/hpg/annual-report](http://www.odi.org/hpg/annual-report)

The **Humanitarian Policy Group** at the **Overseas Development Institute** is dedicated to improving humanitarian policy and practice through original research, high-quality analysis, dialogue and debate.

ODI Charity no. 228248



# HPG

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