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Report

South-South Cooperation:

Diplomatic and Humanitarian Responses to Conflict and Displacement

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Background

There is a long history of actors from across the so-called Global South responding to conflict and displacement situations, including responses developed by states, civil society networks and refugees themselves. In spite of the continued common usage of terms such as 'the international system' and 'the international humanitarian community', as if describing fixed and internally coherent frames of reference,[1] it is increasingly recognised that a plurality of actors (often referred to as 'non-traditional' or 'Southern' responders), 'systems', and 'international communities of response', exist and play important roles in responding to conflict and humanitarian situations globally.[2] This report, and the academic work it both draws upon and contributes to, takes as its starting point the plurality of 'communities of response' to conflict and displacement. In so doing, it seeks to provide a space to critically examine the evolving landscape of and potential for South-South collaborations in diplomatic and humanitarian responses to current and evolving conflict and displacement situations in the Middle East and further afield.

On 26 February 2025, Prof. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (Professor of Migration and Refugees Studies and Principal Investigator of the Southern Responses to Displacement project, University College London) and Dr. Ghassan Elkahlout (Director of the Doha Centre for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies) co-convened a workshop on this topic, in which representatives from major UN agencies and INGOs, alongside experts on conflict mediation, humanitarianism and responses to displacement, came together to collectively examine the challenges and opportunities of collaboration in diplomatic and humanitarian responses to conflict and displacement. It did so with a particular focus on responses to displacement in and from Syria, Gaza and Lebanon.

The workshop built upon the Convenors' long-standing research endeavours which have traced the roles that Southern states (variously labelled as 'non-traditional', 'Southern' and/or 'postcolonial') and non-state actors (including transnational faith networks, diaspora organisations and refugees themselves) have been playing in responding to conflict and displacement.[3] Inter alia, the convenors' respective research endeavours have sought to examine how, why and with what effect differently positioned actors have been responding to displacement.

Two recent research projects led by Prof. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (Refugee Hosts, and Southern Responses to Displacement[4]) have undertaken a total of c. 1,000 interviews in Lebanon, Jordan and Türkiye with refugees from Syria, members of host communities, local and international responders and other elite stakeholders, seeking to better understand different models and principles of local and Southern responses, and, in particular, how refugees and hosts themselves experience and perceive 'local community responses' as well as 'Southern' and 'Northern' responses to displacement.[5]

Complementing this focus on refugees and hosts' own perceptions of local, Southern and Northern-led humanitarian responses, the Convenors' respective research projects have also analysed the relationship between 'non-traditional' actors themselves as well as their relationships with 'Northern' actors. Such research has suggested the potential for South-South or horizontal forms of collaboration, including on intra- and inter-regional levels: for instance, Dr. Ghassan Elkahlout and Dr. Sansom Milton have pointed to the potential of intra-regional cooperation across the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)[6]; and Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh has examined transregional cooperation between different states of South America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Middle East.[7]

Building upon the Convenors' respective research agendas, this closed workshop (following Chatham House rules) centralised the Guest Participants' expert contributions to maintain a critical focus on mapping past and present examples of states' diplomatic and humanitarian responses in conflict and displacement spaces (including states from areas often categorised as 'the global South'), and to examine the challenges and opportunities of such responses in the past, present and future.
To this end, the workshop was structured in three sessions:

1. Categories, Labels and Definitions: Understanding Southern and non-traditional responses
2. North-South and South-South Relations: Complementary or contradictory?
3. Barriers and Opportunities for South-South or Horizontal Cooperation

This report draws together key thematic insights arising from the Workshop, concluding with recommendations for next steps.

Opening Discussion: Southern Responses to Displacement

From the outset, the workshop acknowledged the importance of **contemporary challenges facing refugee response**, including the widespread impacts of **US policies to withdraw financial support** for the international humanitarian system. In many regards, the humanitarian field faces an **existential crisis**, and yet there has been a gradual erosion of international norms over the past decades, including following the Iraq War. Indeed, major cuts in financial and material support are taking place at the same time as **the space for advocacy and dialogue is shrinking**, especially in light of the Israeli state's genocidal violence in Gaza. In such a context, major barriers exist for state and non-state actors to reach and influence decision-makers, and advocacy itself has a high cost.

Against the intersecting histories of **long-standing challenges to the sustainability and ethics of refugee response** on the one hand, but also the **diversity of state and non-state actors responding to conflict and displacement around the world** on the other, the workshop was convened as an opportunity to **look beyond the "presentist tendencies"** in research, policy, and practice, and instead to learn from the past and recognize the plurality and potential of responses globally.[8]

The workshop opened with a short presentation introducing the Southern Responses to Displacement: Views from Lebanon, Jordan and Türkiye (SOURCED) project,[9] which has been examining **how, why and with what effect different forms of responses to conflict and displacement are conceptualised, negotiated, accepted and/or rejected by refugees themselves**.

Taking a **multi-scalar perspective**, the SOURCED project has explored responses by **states and civil societies** (including displaced people themselves) as well as **regional initiatives** – such as the role played by the Arab League and states from the Gulf – in supporting refugees from Syria who have sought refuge in Lebanon, Jordan and Türkiye; in addition to a range of **transnational and transregional initiatives** focused on material and financial provision and through which states have played key roles in providing access to resettlement opportunities; advocating for refugee rights; and acting as conflict mediators.

Southern Responses to Displacement from Syria

In 2011, as the (now deposed) Syrian regime responded with both widespread and targeted violence to a major challenge to its authority by protestors and eventually armed groups in 2011 – variously referred to as the Syrian Uprising, Revolution or Civil War – mass displacement took place within and from the country. By the end of 2024 – when the Assad regime was overthrown and new forms of uncertainty and insecurity about the future of Syria emerged – over 6.2 million people from Syria (including Syrians, Palestinians, Iraqis and Kurds) were estimated to have fled the country: the majority seeking refuge in Türkiye (c. 2.8 million), Lebanon (c. 1 million) and Jordan (564,000). By early-2025, there continued to be c. 7.2 million internally displaced people (IDPs) within Syria.

From 2011 onwards, a wide range of emergency aid programmes were promptly implemented to assist these internationally and internally displaced people, both by UN humanitarian agencies and donor states from the global North, and by actors from across the 'global South.' Such state-led responses include policies and assistance programmes for refugees from Syria developed and implemented by the host states of Lebanon, Jordan and Türkiye, as well as initiatives funded by a range of 'non-traditional' donors. In 2012, for instance, assistance ranged from Morocco sending aid convoys comprising the resources for a field hospital in Jordan,[10] to the Qatar Charity providing food aid and medical assistance to Syrian refugees both in Lebanese border areas and in Jordan as well as providing help with rent and health services in Jordan.[11] At the regional level, in 2012 the Arab League pledged $100m in aid to Syrian refugees.[12] Between 2012 and 2023, it is estimated that Kuwait had provided $800 million in aid, amounting to nearly one third of all humanitarian aid for Syrian refugees and IDPs pledged through the UN; the UAE had offered $364 million.[13] Kuwait's "role in responding to the humanitarian needs of Syria" was publicly heralded by the then-UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, who described the Gulf state as a 'global humanitarian centre'.[14]

While such state-led and regional responses and financial contributions are well documented, commentators have also regularly maintained that civil society groups were amongst the most significant actors supporting IDPs in Syria and refugees in Lebanon, Jordan and Türkiye. These initiatives have included Lebanese, Jordanian and Turkish citizens providing food and shelter to refugees; local faith-based organizations and Syrian faith-leaders delivering aid and providing spiritual support to refugees in Jordan and Lebanon; and Palestinian refugees as well as Syrian refugees who had fled persecution pre-2011 offering support to 'new' refugees seeking sanctuary in Lebanon and Jordan. In turn, regional, national, and 'local' responses have also been complemented by transregional initiatives, including long-standing forms of cooperation between countries as diverse as Brazil, Cuba, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Prior to being displaced to Lebanon, Jordan and Türkiye, refugees from Syria received support from a wide range of individuals, groups and states. They indicated that such responses began with forms of **mutual support** from other people within Syria, through what is well-documented as instances of individuals and community-members being **'first responders'** to conflict and displacement:

> *At the beginning of the battles, we took refuge from our area to the city of Homs. We were embraced by its residents who provided us with housing, food and drink. The aid was individual initiatives, at that time no activity was recorded for international associations or institutions -Syrian refugee from Qusayr living in Akkar (Lebanon)*

> *Yes, we are the people of Yarmouk camp [in Damascus], most of the neighbours resorted to us at the beginning of the crisis and we were their help and extended and did not differentiate between anyone, we received some of them in our homes and others we opened schools for them and gave them a lot, but within our individual capabilities. These institutions that exist now did not exist except for the Syrian Red Crescent. - Palestinian refugee from Yarmouk Camp living in Baddawi camp (Lebanon)*

Interviewees more commonly noted that**, as time passed, a wider range of responders started providing support within Syria**, including '**Southern service providers'**:

> *I got help from refugees and displaced people, even Southern service providers. [...] The refugees looked at each other with sympathy and were sharing their belongings and money in difficult circumstances. The newly established groups also played a key role in providing funds and basic needs to all needy people in Homs Governorate. - Syrian from the Homs countryside living in Baddawi camp (Lebanon)*

Two Syrian refugees interviewed in Türkiye recalled, with regards to the assistance they received whilst **internally displaced within Syria**, that:

> *When shelling accelerated in Idleb city I moved to my home village. In 2015, I left Idlib [and] we received aid as it was distributed to everybody from many organizations from Malaysia, Indonesia and the Gulf countries.*

and

> *We received aid as it was distributed to everybody from organizations from Malaysia, Indonesia and the Arabic Gulf countries.*

Such a diversity of responses further expanded after **crossing the border to neighbouring countries**. In many such instances, it was **people with refugee backgrounds** who **were delivering such aid** and providing such services, as in the case of a Syrian interviewee from Damacus who was working in an NGO in Türkiye when he reported that "we have a lot of Arab donors mainly from the Gulf and we also have three Malaysian donors." In turn, a Palestinian resident of Baddawi refugee camp noted that

> *Countries like Malaysia or Indonesia are undoubtedly key supporters of many local organizations that have never shied away from providing services to refugees from Syria. There is no doubt that the largest contributors to relief operations are Gulf organizations and states that seek to play a political role in the region.*

The SOURCED project has thus been tracing both the **historical and contemporary importance** of actors such as **Brazil**, **Malaysia, Indonesia and Cuba**, as well as **countries of the Gulf**, in supporting Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Syria, Lebanon and Gaza.[15] The roles played by these and other countries were repeatedly mentioned by interviewees:

> *For many years, the countries of the South have provided refugees with valuable assistance. This aid was not exclusive to Syrians, as it also included Palestinian refugees and displaced Lebanese. We have never forgotten the role played by countries such as Libya, Kuwait and Cuba in strengthening the resilience of Palestinian refugees in particular from 1970 to 1990. This assistance was not limited to providing in-kind materials and necessary supplies to refugees inside the Palestinian camps, but also included study grants and work contracts in the above-mentioned countries. It is true that this was in the past, but in my opinion it is the best way to provide assistance to the afflicted peoples. (Palestinian representative of an organisation for young people in Baddawi camp)*

Indeed, state responses include but also going **beyond hosting refugees or being a donor state**. Noting the role of Cuba – a state which has been subject to sanctions since the 1960s – in providing **South-South scholarships** for refugees to study medicine in Havana before returning to work as doctors and nurses to support **collective (rather than individual) self-sufficiency** in their refugee

camp homes, demonstrates the importance of **acknowledging and conceptualising aid beyond material assistance or financial contributions**.[16]

The **legacies** of such initiatives also point to the multiple roles played by refugees themselves in different forms of refugee response, with Cuban-educated Palestinian and Syrian **refugee doctors providing care** to wounded, infirm and dying displaced people in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Türkiye and Gaza.[17]

Unquantifiable Forms of Support: Advocacy and Upholding International Law[18]

In the context of Gaza, in December 2023, the South African government brought a ground-breaking genocide case against Israel before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), seeking and being granted provisional measures to uphold 'the right of the Palestinians in Gaza to be protected from acts of genocide.' Building on a long-standing official tradition of support and solidarity between states that identify themselves or are identified by others as members of the global South, BRICS, and/or the Non-Aligned Movement,[19] South Africa has been supported in its legal case against Israel before the ICJ by Southern and postcolonial countries including Nicaragua, Colombia, Türkiye, Libya, Egypt, Maldives, Mexico, Chile and Cuba.

From the end of 2023 onwards, states from across the global South have thus been recognized as diplomatic leaders at the UN and elsewhere, with South Africa, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Comoros, and Djibouti referring the situation of Palestine to the ICC in November 2023, and numerous states subsequently seeking a permanent ceasefire and compliance with the ICJ's Interim Orders throughout 2024. For instance, resolutions were drafted (inter alia) by Algeria, Ecuador, Guyana, Japan, Malta, Mozambique, Republic of Korea and Sierra Leone in March 2024; Namibia submitted interventions in relation to the South African case brought before the ICJ; and resolutions were passed by the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Arab League.

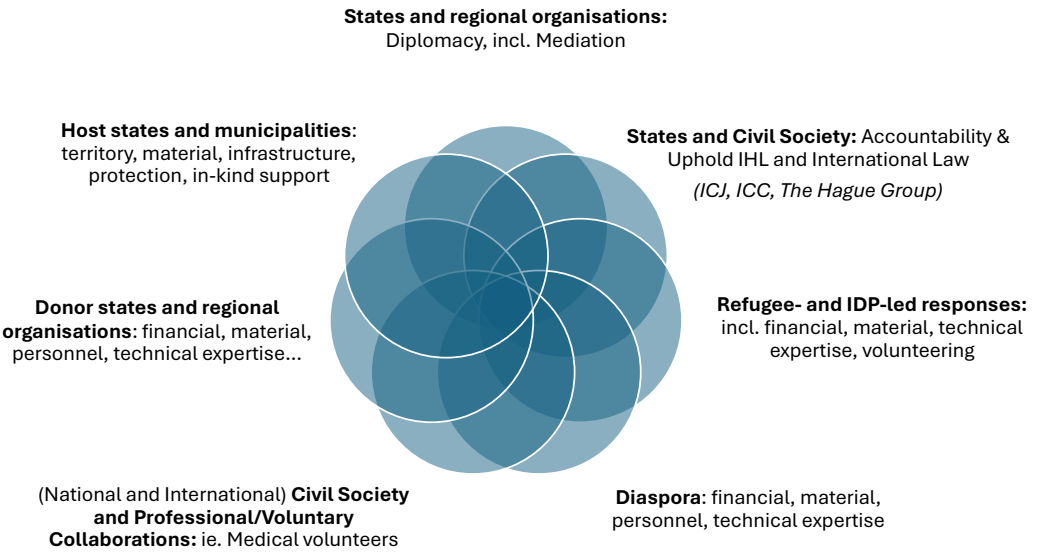
By the end of January 2025, when over 50,000 Palestinians in Gaza were estimated to have been killed by the Israeli army and Gaza's entire population of c. million people had been displaced on multiple occasions, such momentum has led to the inauguration of The Hague Group, founded by the governments of Belize, Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba, Honduras, Malaysia, Namibia, Senegal and South Africa. In their inaugural statement, these states asserted that they had come together "in the solemn commitment to an international order based on the rule of law and international law" alongside "the principles of justice," to uphold UN resolutions and the rulings of the ICJ and the arrest warrants issued by the ICC.

While The Hague Group bears the name of the Dutch city which is home to both the ICJ and the ICC, through such initiatives, these and other states have demonstrated the ways that cooperation and collaboration between states from across the global South can and have come together to uphold international humanitarian law and to hold other states and non-state actors accountable to protect the rights of people subjected to conflict and displacement.

While the very concept and contours of the 'South' remain contested, such acts and actors have often been explicitly positioned as embodying powerful processes of anti-colonial, South-South solidarity, and have rightly been identified as enacting an explicit challenge to the hegemonic 'world order' and to the 'West'/ 'global North'. Nonetheless, it is essential to view these processes, and this moment, not as an exception or a paradigm shift per se, but rather as part of a long history of 'Southern responses' to 'humanitarian crises' and crises of protection.[20]

Such multiscalar responses to displacement, whether in the case of Syria, Lebanon or Gaza, can be represented as follows:

Figure 1: Multiscalar Responses to Displacement



Designed by Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh

Categories, Labels and Definitions: Understanding Southern and non-traditional responses

Building on this opening presentation, the discussion turned to **examining the terminology** used to describe "Southern" and/or "non-traditional" state-led responses. While participants noted that "non-traditional actors" are sometimes seen as "new arrivals," the workshop emphasized the **long history of states around the world responding to displacement**, extending far beyond traditional "donor states." It was also agreed that it is helpful to explore whether we need terminology to distinguish between **donor states, hosting states** and **states involved in conflict mediation**, and also how we can describe differently positioned **non-state actors**.

Local and Southern Responders[21]

More so than the notion of 'the local' as invoked in the 'localisation of aid' agenda, the notion of 'Southern responders' has the potential to capture and map different forms of response across different scales (from the neighbourhood to national to regional and transnational organisations). Attention to 'Southern responders' can make visible those responders and forms of response that are largely invisible, and to examine how and why these interact with one another and impact people's lives on the ground. When some responders and responses are hypervisible, while some others are either invisible or not seen as reliable, there is a need to understand how the potentials and paradoxes of multiple scales and forms of response are playing out.

Throughout the interviews conducted as part of the SOURCED project, humanitarian practitioners ranged from indicating that they had "never heard of" the term 'Southern responder', to interviewees who viewed the category of 'the South' as demeaning: "It is undermining the capacities of these countries... it gives this kind of label of 'vulnerable' and 'incapable.'" In contrast, other interviewees reported that "I use South all the time: it is an important concept," and one practitioner concluded that:

> *Southern-led provision is an ok term to refer to global South entities [...] the important thing is not making crude divisions between hemispheres and not drawing forms of 'Othering'. For pragmatic reasons 'Southern' does clarify to me what you are talking about and it is not problematic. Maybe 'local' is not always appropriate instead, and it is politically loaded as it is usually used against the 'international.'*

The aim of the SOURCED project has not been to define or delimit the parameters of 'the South' or of 'Southern responses'; instead, its aim is to draw visibility to and explore different articulations, principles and conceptualisations of responses enacted and experienced on multiple levels and scales.

In addition to debating the meaning and potential of the concept of 'the South' and 'the Southern', the **relevance of existing clusters and labels was questioned**. Grouping states as "traditional" or "non-traditional" was widely seen as unhelpful, instead noting similarities in stated purposes and the long history of many state's initiatives in the areas of humanitarian and development response. It was agreed that **grouping can artificially reinforce distinctions**, and the level of funding can appear to solidify these distinctions.

Specific examples of **problematic groupings** included "emerging donors", "BRICS," and "Gulf or GCC donors," that are internally diverse in motivation and approach, lacking clear criteria for similarities: one participant argued that "there is so much diversity that grouping them is meaningless." A point of discussion was whether it might be more helpful to see **what makes each donor distinct,** rather than grouping them on the basis of regional blocs or income levels.

The **accuracy of defining the UN as "Northern"** was debated: on the one hand, c. 80% of funding comes from the "usual suspects" (often seen as Northern countries, with the US contributing 40% of UNHCR's budget until recently), and yet its longer history, and ground-up changes driven by local staff mean that there is no normative reason why the UN should be considered to represent Northern countries. On the ground there was a historic shift in aid provision where the UN transitioned from distributing food boxes to giving people cash: this shift was pushed forward by locally-based staff.

Indeed, the UN agencies have non-earmarked funds which allows local staff to redesign ground-up programmes. Nonetheless, the perception of the UN as "Northern" is influenced by power struggles within and between the permanent members of the Security Council.

Beyond 'Non-Traditional' or 'New' Actors

Although Gulf states are often referred to in the literature as 'non-traditional donors,' it is essential to recognize the long history of these and other actors' responses. For instance, Elkahlout notes that far from being 'new', Kuwait is an "an inveterate humanitarian donor" with over 50 years of experience.[22] Indeed, while USAID was established in 1962, "Kuwait was the first [Gulf state] to create [a humanitarian and development assistance] fund in 1961- the Kuwait Fund for Arab Development".[23]

Diverse Forms of Response and Actors:

As noted throughout the workshop, refugee response goes **beyond material assistance or financial contributions**. Equally, state responses include but also go beyond hosting refugees or being a donor state. As such, there is a long history of support that includes **financial aid, in-kind material supplies, study grants, work contracts, and educational initiatives** geared towards collective self-sufficiency. **Cuba's transnational education program** for refugees was cited as an example of supporting humanitarian services outside the existing global system.[24] This form of support is often **not captured or added to global support levels**.

While there has been extensive attention to the states of the Gulf, the historical importance of actors like **Brazil**, **Malaysia, Cuba, and Indonesia** supporting refugees in and from the Middle East, including through resettlement programmes, fostering and sponsorships, educational migration programmes, as well as material aid provision and political advocacy, was noted.[25]

Other forms of support which are significant but often not conceptualised 'as' a form of response include **refugee-led responses** on individual, communal and collective levels alike.

With regards to the localisation of aid agenda, it was noted that **national actors** are often excluded from discussions that focus either on the international or on the sub-national local levels. This prompted questions about why local actors are preferred over national ones. On the one hand, **local governments** were identified as potentially powerful and impactful actors; on the other hand, the denomination of some political entities as 'failed states' while others are subjected to sanctions has led to a lack both of trust and of capacity that is seen as needing to be 'filled' by other (sub-national and supra-national) actors. Major challenges also include the **unwillingness of certain state authorities** to take responsibility for providing assistance, including in instances where the state itself is involved in violating people's rights.

At the same time, allocating aid to local implementing partners can further erode governmental capacity, which has led to **NGOs** being seen at times as undermining the development of national capacity. In turn, the perception of the **UN as an intermediary** receiving funds and channeling to national responders was discussed, alongside its system of inserting itself in the host context and then handing over to 'local' actors.

The weakening of states was acknowledged as not only arising from conflict but also as being part of the **broader legacies of colonialism and the neoliberal order**. The decisions of the member states of the G77 to engage in **cooperation** (eschewing the vocabulary of 'development' or 'humanitarianism') in ways that do not challenge the principle of national sovereignty was notable here.[26]

'Cooperation' vs 'Aid'[27]

The Group of 77 (G77) was established in 1964 and originally had 77 member states. It is "the largest intergovernmental organization of developing countries in the United Nations," and their members (now numbering 134 states) purposefully refrain from using terms such as 'humanitarian assistance' or 'aid donor' as this vocabulary is intimately related to the Northern-led regime. Instead, the notion of 'cooperation,' including as it pertains to 'South-South cooperation,' is consciously used and has been both actively and implicitly promoted by different states at different points of time.

The G77 member states' purposive distancing from mainstream terminology is one way of discursively affirming the unique approach taken by Southern actors, and is paralleled by recurrent references in official state and organisational statements to the underlying principles that motivate and frame South-South cooperation: mutual benefit, solidarity, reciprocity, the absence of political conditionalities, and non-interference in the national sovereignty of other states.

The principles of the G77 are closely linked to those of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), including NAM's established aim of developing both national and collective self-reliance, to enable Southern states to operate and thrive outside of Northern states' economic, political and ideological spheres of influence.

Some states are **pushing against multilateralism** and are instead seeking to mobilise aid more explicitly to revolve around **national agendas** and interests. At the same time as donor states may increasingly **seek an explicit return of their 'investment,'** however, there is also potential for responses which go beyond material and financial support and which draw states together on the basis of common principles. Leveraging states, organisations and civil society networks to **work together, not to centralize** the humanitarian system, has the potential to bring the best out of a decentralized system, recognizing the uniqueness of each actor.

Extensive attention has been given to 'donor states' and 'host states', and yet the importance of acknowledging and recognizing '**unquantifiable' forms of response** was stressed, citing **South Africa's case at the ICJ** and **The Hague Group** upholding International Humanitarian Law and Palestinian rights as examples of state involvement not centred on financial donations. The discussion emphasized the need to ask about the **quality of support, not just the quantity**. In particular, the potential for **transnational and transregional initiatives** like The Hague Group was noted as a way to **transcend the focus on regional blocs or income levels**. Building **bilateral coalitions** around common principles and commitments to international law was also suggested as a possibility.

Southern Roots of and Routes to Human Rights and Refugee Response[28]

Formerly colonised states played a key role in shaping human rights frameworks from the very birth of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[29] Indeed, in another context, Achille Mbembe maintains that the Western archive is 'neither monolithic, nor the exclusive property of the West,' since, according to him, 'Africa and its diaspora decisively contributed to its making and should legitimately make foundational claims on it.'[30] By extension, rather than positioning formerly colonised states as acting from the periphery or in an antagonistic manner, 'the South' has a foundational role, and thus has foundational claims, upon international rights and legal frameworks and refugee response.[31]

Building on the Southern roots of and routes to international rights and legal frameworks, there is a strong potential for Southern state and non-state actors to continue playing a pivotal role in refugee response: not substituting Northern states – which have a responsibility to respond, often due to their roles in instituting, funding and otherwise being complicit in the conflicts which cause displacement – but embodying intellectual and political leadership in this area.

A key question, however, is which states, if any, are willing and able to take such leadership roles, whether regionally or on the global state.

The need for **national strategies** was reasserted, especially as a way of overcoming the damage caused by what one participant called "**whimsical interventions.**" By this, they referred to the processes by which one person wishes for a state to participate and yet, when they lose interest, the entire donor's position changes. In many such instances, donorship is driven by personal decisions rather than national strategies. When that person leaves, the initiative disappears, leaving significant gaps as a result.

The personal, or 'whimsical' nature of decision-making, also means that accessing funders and leaders can be challenging for many actors, often depending on personal access to **local elites** (typically male, rich, and not displaced); this, in turn, leads to sporadic rather than consistent forms of aid. The challenge is not to "overcorrect" with bureaucracy, but to recognise the value in creating structures which will be **accessible beyond other members of the elite**. This is important to potentially secure opportunities for reliable and consistent forms of aid.

Successes in Southern Leadership: A Need for Continuous Engagement[32]

A country from the global South was the Chair of the donor group supporting the allocation and distribution of funds at a UN Agency. Even through this was an Advisory Group, since both donors and NGOs were at the table, holding the position of Chair was very relevant. An observer of one of these meetings noted that 'being in the room' mattered significantly. When that country's term ended as Chair, however, the country disappeared entirely from the group. This was considered to be a huge loss since following their withdrawal, there were suddenly no Southern donors in the room.

Even though this state's financial contribution was relatively small comparatively speaking, being present offered credibility and legitimacy. Rather than the conversation being dominated by the same voices, the presence of a Southern donor could ensure that key points were debated and considered from different perspectives. It was noted that the representative of another Northern donor state, which offers a much smaller financial contribution than the Southern donor, is always in the room and has also held the position of co-chair. The potential for change requires consistency and forms of continuous engagement, amongst both Southern and Northern donors.

In the process of developing national strategies, an "**overcorrection**" for a previous lack of bureaucracy has led some Southern donors to **imitate models that are not originally theirs**. Participants suggested that donors should create their own **hybrid systems to ensure both ownership and appropriateness** to the context in which they are operating.

Noting the heterogeneity of Gulf states, **the states of the GCC** were discussed in terms of their funding structures. While Northern states raise funds via taxes and through annual budgets, funding in the context of the states of the GCC is often based on **discretionary orders and donations**. For instance, state-provided aid may be allocated following an order by a Monarch or Emir. In turn, large individual donations are often being made in shopping malls, with one participant recalling women pulling gold chains off their necks and depositing their jewellery in donation boxes to support refugees. Such initiatives deserve acknowledgement in their own right, as well as leading to broader questions pertaining to **charitable giving vs sustainable responses**.

The interplay between societal culture and institutional culture were highlighted as important: generosity from people does not always translate into governmental institutional implementation. There may also be a difficulty in classifying contributions from the **public/private sectors vs. government**. For instance, in some contexts public donations are often or always supplemented by government contributions. In turn, when donations are derived from a 'national campaign,' it may be **unclear if the support is from people or the government**. In turn, when a community donates, but their donations are collected and distributed by the government on their behalf, it may be unclear how such donations should be classified. Whether such classifications are necessary – and from whose perspectives – was also debated, noting that in some contexts the lines between NGOs and governments are either blurred or do not exist.

Islamic cooperation and Zakat[33]

Islamic cooperation through bodies like the OIC was explored, noting its own mechanisms and resolutions, sometimes replicating the UN system but with its own Development Funds. Islamic philanthropy and Zakat were highlighted as significant potential sources of funds, noting that if Zakat were collected methodically, it could cover global humanitarian needs multiple times over, although barriers exist (e.g., Islamic Relief-USA has been unable to operate in Gaza). Financial institutions in the South such as regional and transregional Development Banks and Solidarity Funds, were seen as having great potential, offering assistance with fewer conditions and being Shariah compliant. Examples based on the Waqf model were noted, including the OIC Islamic Solidarity Fund in Jeddah as well as the Global Islamic Fund for Refugees, managed by the Islamic Development Bank. These were identified are effective models of South-South Cooperation.

The **quantity of projects** supported as well as the **quantity of funds** were mentioned in relation to the potential impact on the one hand and the possibility of scaling up on the other. When a high-income donor **supports too many initiatives and in so doing spreads assistance thin**, this may limit its wider impacts and influence as a result. In turn, while a country may implement a celebrated but relatively small project, its **scalability needs to be taken into consideration alongside its visibility**.

The **overlapping position of states** simultaneously being a host state and a donor state was also discussed. For instance, **Türkiye** was highlighted as an actor that has effectively used foreign aid as a diplomatic and political tool and which has been very visible internationally through its responses to conflict, disaster and displacement situations. **Malaysia** was presented as another model, hosting Rohingya refugees as well as Palestinian refugee students within its territory, whilst also providing material and financial assistance in Lebanon and Gaza, and engaging in advocacy through its support for South Africa's case at the ICJ and its membership of The Hague Group. This leads to two questions: firstly, **how we classify or recognise the roles played by the same state across different geographies**. And secondly, **which states are willing and able to take leadership roles in advocacy and diplomatic efforts** to end conflict and seek solutions to protracted displacement situations.

Cooperation and Competition

A central question debated throughout the workshop was whether Southern and Northern responses are complementary or exist in opposition to one another, and, in turn, what the implications for humanitarian policy and operations are. As a whole, the opportunity for true multilateralism to play a more central and proactive role was discussed, noting the strength of coalitions seeking to protect and uphold International Humanitarian Law at the ICJ, ICC and beyond.

It was noted that there can be **competition rather than necessarily cooperation** between Northern and Southern actors on the one hand, and also within and between Southern groups on the other. Importantly, political crises between member states can have a significant impact on regional actors. As challenges exist in both **inter- and intra-regional collaboration**, dynamics between the members of regional blocs should not be assumed; the potential for relationships across regions remains to be examined.

There are many instances of **collaboration** between Southern and Northern actors. For instance, a Southern host state offers its territory to provide shelter and protection to refugees while a major Northern donor makes significant financial contributions in support of that state, and offers a small number of resettlement places in return. However, the **motivations** underpinning such collaborations are **questionable**. In other instances, collaboration is **reciprocal by necessity**.

Northern donors have often imposed **conditionalities on aid,** and have tried to influence states and groups around the world. Such attempts to change Southern states' ways of working have rarely worked and have often backfired. Often, Southern donors emphatically wish to be **seen as distinct from Northern donors**. A participant indicated that when they speak to a Southern donor about a particular campaign or funding need, if they mention the approach taken by a specific Northern donor as part of the conversation, the Southern donor often emphasizes their difference from the North, indicating that if their country's approach is not valued then it would be better to return to the Northern donor.

While Northern donors often demand that local partners work in a particular way and fit specific standards, it is possible to both **complement and challenge Northern approaches with local expertise**. As different standards exist within and across different actors, **local expertise holds precedence** in terms of its validity on the ground. Rather than Southern actors having to conform with Northern forms of working, **Northern actors can seek to complement the requirements and resources of Southern actors.**

In turn, the international level and nature of South-South cooperation should not be given, as **potential competition within processes of South-South cooperation** exists. For instance, a given country in Asia offered assistance to a neighbouring state after a typhoon, but this aid was rejected because it was perceived as a geopolitical step to humiliate and undermine the neighbouring state. This reminds us that although South-South cooperation exists widely in disaster situations, this does not necessarily mean that such responses are underpinned by principles of collaboration or equality.

Potential for South-South Cooperation

The model of **triangular cooperation** can potentially benefit donors from the global South as well as actors from the North. However, attempts to promote Southern donorship or South-South cooperation may not work since organisations may be **attempting to influence an entity that does not have decision-making capacities.** For instance, lobbying the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is unlikely to lead to an increase in donations since technocrats do not allocate funds. In Southern states and organisations without **allocated aid budgets or official strategies**, refugee response may be approached in an **ad hoc manner**. Other challenges include a **lack of coordination** among and between different development and funding agencies, even within the same country; this sometimes leads to silos. Here, a **change in legal frameworks is needed to change the models** of working.

There are several **regional responses in the context of disaster response**: for instance, ECOWAS, ASEAN and SARC all have relevant legal frameworks, often with specific units. These regional bodies have developed relevant institutional frameworks for disaster response, especially to

collaborate in disaster management. Disaster management is recognised as a process that states and regional bodies are willing to engage and collaborate in, while doing so in the contexts of conflict and displacement can be more politically challenging. Regional organisations and bodies have **demonstrated their capacity to develop and delivery disaster response:** there is also **strong potential for Southern-led responses in conflict and refugee situations**.

Some Southern organisations may **prioritise policy-making and capacity-building**, rather than prioritising **large-scale funding**. Even in organisations that are reactive rather than proactive, they often have a track record of relevant policy-making. This demonstrates the potential for the **development of further regional initiatives**. Collaborative **statements have limited tangential impact**, and **collective advocacy and programming** should be prioritised.

Certain regional organisations have "**loud voices, but they do not speak in one unifying voice**." Political agendas are needed to reach a **regional consensus**, and some regional blocs such as ASEAN, AU and the EU have successfully unified their message. There is potential for other regional organisations to work to **identify common principles** in relation to international law and refugee response, and to **establish efficient humanitarian organisations** with **sustainable funds** accordingly.

Policy changes do not take place overnight and **momentum must be maintained**. Many actors are stuck in an emergency response mode and they must instead **maintain focus on longer-term policy changes**. While financial support is essential, more attention must be given to **sustainable programming**. This may require returning to the **core mandate** and ensuring that protection is at the heart of refugee response.

There is great potential for **horizontal learning** within frameworks of South-South cooperation, whether **intra- or trans-regionally**; this possibility should be explored more fully in conflict and displacement situations, and can include **collaboration between states on the one hand and between non-state actors on the other**.

For instance, ICVA's **regional advocacy** in Gaza has involved Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt and Yemen. The example of Palestinian NGOs and Yemeni NGOs collaborating to **advocate for crisis diffusion** was offered as an example of **horizontal learning across NGOs and civil society networks**.

Successes in South-South Cooperation: Thematic Coalitions and the SDGs[34]

In the process of developing the SDG principles and goals, G77+China, AU and ASEAN successfully pushed back on the original framing of the SDGs. On the basis of a thematic coalition, the G77+China, AU and ASEAN negotiated collectively and resisted Northern-led requests to keep discussions behind closed doors. Instead, the coalition pushed for and insisted on open discussions. In so doing, they were able to collectively reframe the entire process, and the final output was different from the initial product.

This example of South-South Cooperation shows that thematic coalitions can be effective.

Next Steps

Major gaps in funding and trust have to be filled. The next steps must start by reflecting both on **what is already working**, and **what needs to change**.

At a time when many states in the North are withdrawing or retracting from norm protection, Southern states and organisations are already **taking leadership positions** – not necessarily to substitute Northern powers but to offer responsibility and **demand accountability**. The roles played by Southern state and non-state actors, including in areas of **advocacy and diplomacy**, should complement financial and non-financial responses by Northern states: the latter still have a **responsibility to protect and uphold people's rights**. The legacies of colonial occupation and exploitation, as well as **the "polluter pays" principle** as it applies in both environmental crises and conflict situations, means that states which have a **historical responsibility** for causing or being complicit in displacement should still be held accountable **and offer assistance and/or other forms of restitution** accordingly.

It is time to **localize resources and power**, not just shifting responsibility; it is **also time to recognize and value actors and contributions from around the world.** To 'fill gaps', it is important to not only **diversify actors but also to diversify forms of response**. In effect, states with varying degrees of income and of relative geopolitical power **can offer different forms of response**, including **material and financial donation**s and **in-kind contributions; opportunities for scholarships, educational migration, as well as regularising safe migratory pathways**; in addition to **advocacy and cooperation in knowledge exchange and policy-making.**

Ways should be found to **include contributions from actors operating outside the traditional system**. Throughout, relationships should be reframed as **partnerships rather than donor-recipient** to ease tensions and widen the scope of collaboration.

Exploring and supporting **state-led and community-led Islamic philanthropy and Zakat mechanisms** is valuable. Yet it is also important to **recognize and value forms of support beyond financial donations**. This includes acknowledging 'unquantifiable' contributions such as those provided through state and non-state actors' advocacy and the promotion of the rule of law. **Legal frameworks, including policies and advocacy**, can provide legal security and opportunities for states and civil society actors to contribute in different ways.

Collaboration and partnerships on multiple scales offer opportunities for efficient and equitable approaches to refugee response. This includes bilateral coalitions, multilateral organisations, and transregional networks. **Coordination between different responders is essential, noting that** coordination can **transcend fixed geographical locations** and be based on common principles, as seen in groups like The Hague Group.

Horizontal thematic coalitions between state and non-state actors may offer opportunities to identify and build upon common principles rather than geographical proximity alone. Even **small coalitions and strengthening bilateral relations** can help uphold international law and bolster the legitimacy of the UN, which has a clear mandate in these areas.

Regional cooperation can work even if specific regions lack significant geopolitical power. Lessons can be learned across regions, and existing regional groupings can become coordinated around

relevant issues. Here, it is important to **maintain momentum and support for regional bodies**, leveraging their **track records in policy-making**. It could also include **extending their collaborations in disaster response to cooperation in refugee response.**

Funders should have mechanisms to coordinate what is being funded and prioritize needs. States developing strategies for conflict/displacement response should **communicate them to other parties** to identify linkages, opportunities for co-funding, or other forms of joint support.

Across the board, **collective advocacy and programming should be prioritised** over collaborative statements which have limited impact. Humanitarian actors need to **keep an eye on longer-term policy changes**, not just emergency response. **Building legal frameworks** to potentially change aid models can provide legal security both for refugees and for those actors advocating for their rights.

Innovation can entail revisiting what has worked historically and **what has been valued** by different people affected by conflict and displacement. This requires careful analysis. **More research and dissemination are needed** to raise awareness about the roles played by various state and non-state actors, their activities, and motivations. Researchers should **map the roles played by diverse actors** and, in so doing, **center how refugees experience, conceptualise and evaluate different forms of response**.

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[33] Examples provided by workshop participants.

[34] Case study provided by a workshop participant.

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