

The 2015 UN-coordinated appeals: An ambitious plan to meet growing humanitarian needs

Introduction

Last year, as we [reported](#), saw two major changes to the UN-coordinated appeals:

- 1) [Changes in scale](#), both in terms of the overall amount requested and the shortfall, as well as large individual appeals and several simultaneous Level 3 emergencies.¹
- 2) [System changes](#), indicating a shift in the way that funding needs were analysed and presented. For example, the move from Consolidated Appeals (CAPs) to Strategic Response Plans (SRPs) and an increase in multi-year appeals.²

In 2015, there is a renewed focus on how needs are assessed, costed and prioritised within appeals, including as part of initiatives and consultations on humanitarian financing in the run-up to the World Humanitarian Summit. Discussions are focused on what this means for donor decision making and the consequences of low, unpredictable and variable levels of funding for crisis-affected countries.

The full set of UN-coordinated appeals for 2015 is now available.³ So, as donors set out to consider how to direct and prioritise their funding and agencies continue to implement the response plans, what does the picture look like in 2015? How does it compare with last year? What are the changes in terms of the scale and content of the appeals?

Part 1: The scale: Humanitarian needs and funding

2014: Record funding but with a high shortfall

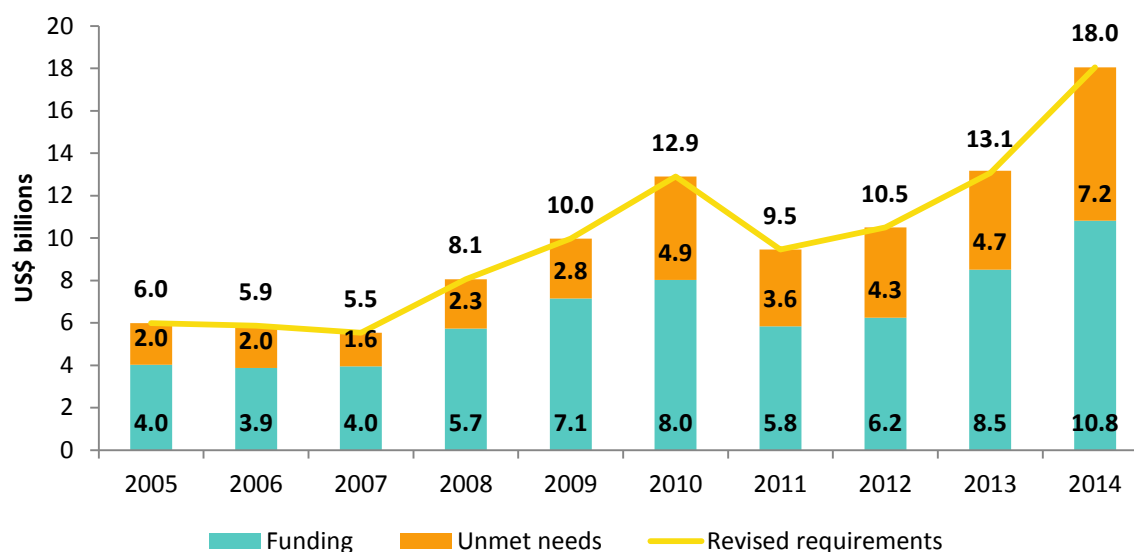
A record US\$10.8 billion was channelled through UN-coordinated appeals in 2014 (Figure 1). However, given the severity of needs last year – driven both by the number of UN appeals (thirty, the highest number of UN-coordinated appeals since 2007) and by their scale and scope (appeals for Syria and neighbouring countries, for example, requested almost US\$6 billion) – unmet needs also rose to a high of 40% of the total amount requested in 2014, or US\$7.2 billion. The average level of unmet needs from 2003–2014 was 34%.

¹ A Level 3 emergency is the UN's highest level of emergency.

² Consolidated Appeals (CAPs) were the precursor to the current Strategic Response Plan (SRP) and Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO), introduced in 2014.

³ This includes funds for Strategic Response Plans (SRPs)³ and Flash Appeals, coordinated by the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), as well as Regional Response Plans (RRPs), coordinated by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR).

Figure 1: Funding and unmet needs, UN-coordinated appeals, 2005–2014



Source: Development Initiatives based on UN OCHA FTS data.

Notes: Data for 2014 does not include the Ebola Virus appeal; 2012 data includes the Syria RRP 2012 monitored by UNHCR.

2015: Highest level of requirements to date

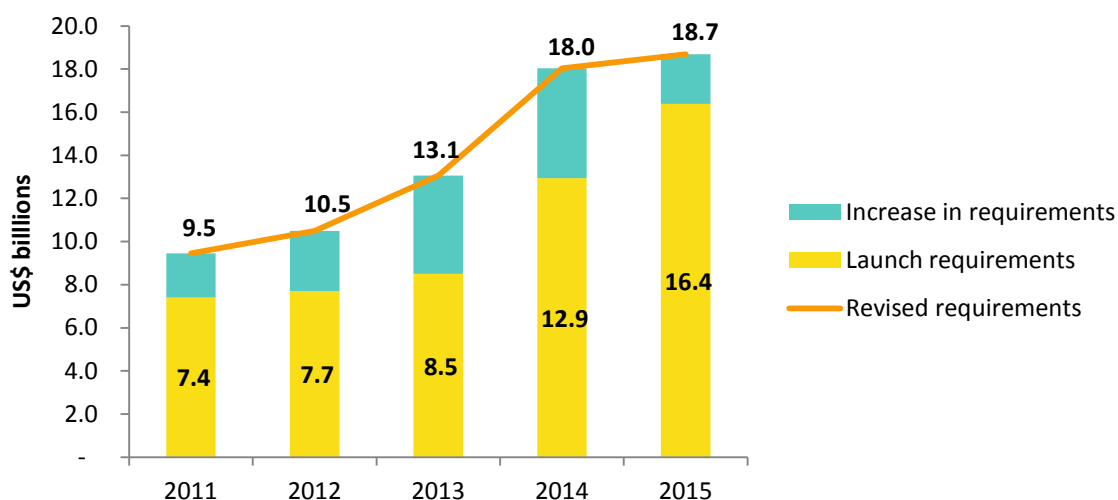
The amount requested in 2015 has reached a new record high of US\$18.7 billion (Figure 2).⁴ Only three months into the year the funding requested for 2015 is already US\$0.7 billion higher than the amount requested within the 2014 UN-coordinated appeals.⁵

This amount will continue to increase during the course of the year. There has been a 14% increase already in the three months between the launch of the 2015 SRPs in December 2014 and the time of writing. This is primarily due to the launch of new appeals that had not yet been finalised by the end of 2014. As in previous years, it is likely that the amount requested will continue to increase as existing SRPs are revised and new appeals are added. This is, by its nature, unpredictable, but based on an average increase of 39% over the last four years (2011–2014), SRP requirements for 2015 could rise to as high as US\$22.8 billion by the end of the year.

⁴ Not including the 2014 or 2015 portions of the *Ebola Outbreak: Updated overview of needs and requirements* or the US\$26 million Republic of Congo component of the Central African Republic (CAR) Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) 2015 – see notes under Figure 2 for more details.

⁵ US\$18 million was the amount requested at the end of 2014.

Figure 2: Launch requirements and revised requirements for UN-coordinated appeals, 2011–2015



Source: Development Initiatives based on UN OCHA FTS data, OCHA Global Humanitarian Assistance Overviews and OCHA press statements.

Notes: Does not include the Ebola Virus appeal in 2014 and 2015, nor the CAR Regional Refugee Response 2015, the majority of which is covered under other SRPs (Cameroon, Chad and DRC), apart from the Republic of Congo component, which amounts to US\$26 million.

Fewer appeals but the same number of countries covered

In 2015 so far there are 28 appeals covering 32 countries, whereas in 2014 there were 30 appeals by the end of that year, also covering 32 countries.⁶ Notable absentees in this year’s list of countries with UN-coordinated appeals are Haiti, the Philippines (which had three separate appeals in 2014) and the Republic of Congo, all of which have issued CAPs, SRPs and/or Flash Appeals in previous years.⁷ Ukraine is included in the list of countries with SRPs for the first time in 2015, owing to conflict and displacement in the east of the country; as is Vanuatu, following tropical Cyclone Pam in March 2015. Honduras and Guatemala are also both new appearances in the list, albeit with relatively small appeals – this is a notable change since countries from the Central America region have not appeared since Flash Appeals for El Salvador and Nicaragua in 2011.

The list of appeals includes four Level 3 emergencies in the Central African Republic (CAR), South Sudan, Syria and Iraq, totalling US\$11.7 billion (62% of global requirements). The [Ebola Outbreak: Updated overview of needs and requirements](#), which requests a total of US\$1.5 billion from January to June 2015, is not included in the list of appeals but does feature separately on the UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)’s Financial Tracking Service (FTS).⁸

⁶ Not including the Ebola Virus appeal in 2014 and 2015, or in the CAR Regional Refugee Response 2015. The Djibouti SRP 2015 is expected to launch in the coming weeks, bringing the 2015 total up to 29 appeals covering 33 countries.

⁷ Seven UN-coordinated appeals for Haiti have been issued between 2000 and 2015; seven for the Republic of Congo; and four for the Philippines in the same period. There is no specific appeal in 2015 for the Republic of Congo. However, the 2015 CAR RRP coordinated by UNHCR does include a component for refugees in the Republic of Congo.

⁸ OCHA’s Financial Tracking Service notes that the current overall revised requirements for the Ebola Virus Outbreak response are \$2.27 billion from October 2014 until June 2015.

2015: Over 74 million people targeted to receive humanitarian assistance

SRPs, RRP and Flash Appeals in 2015 identify almost 106 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in 33 countries. Of this total, just over 74 million people are targeted to receive humanitarian assistance. This is a decrease from the estimated 87 million people in 2014 and the 78 million people in 2013 targeted to receive assistance through UN-coordinated appeals; however, the number can be expected to increase as the year progresses.⁹

The new system, introduced in the 2014 appeals, follows a coordinated series of actions within the Humanitarian Programming Cycle and thereby generates more comparable data between crises on the numbers of people in need and the numbers targeted within each response plan. Using these figures, a look across the different UN-coordinated appeals in 2015 (Figure 3) shows significant differences, both in terms of the amounts requested as well as the number of people estimated to be in need of and targeted to receive humanitarian assistance. The sums requested range from US\$13 million in Honduras to US\$4.5 billion for the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan in response to the Syria crisis (3RP).

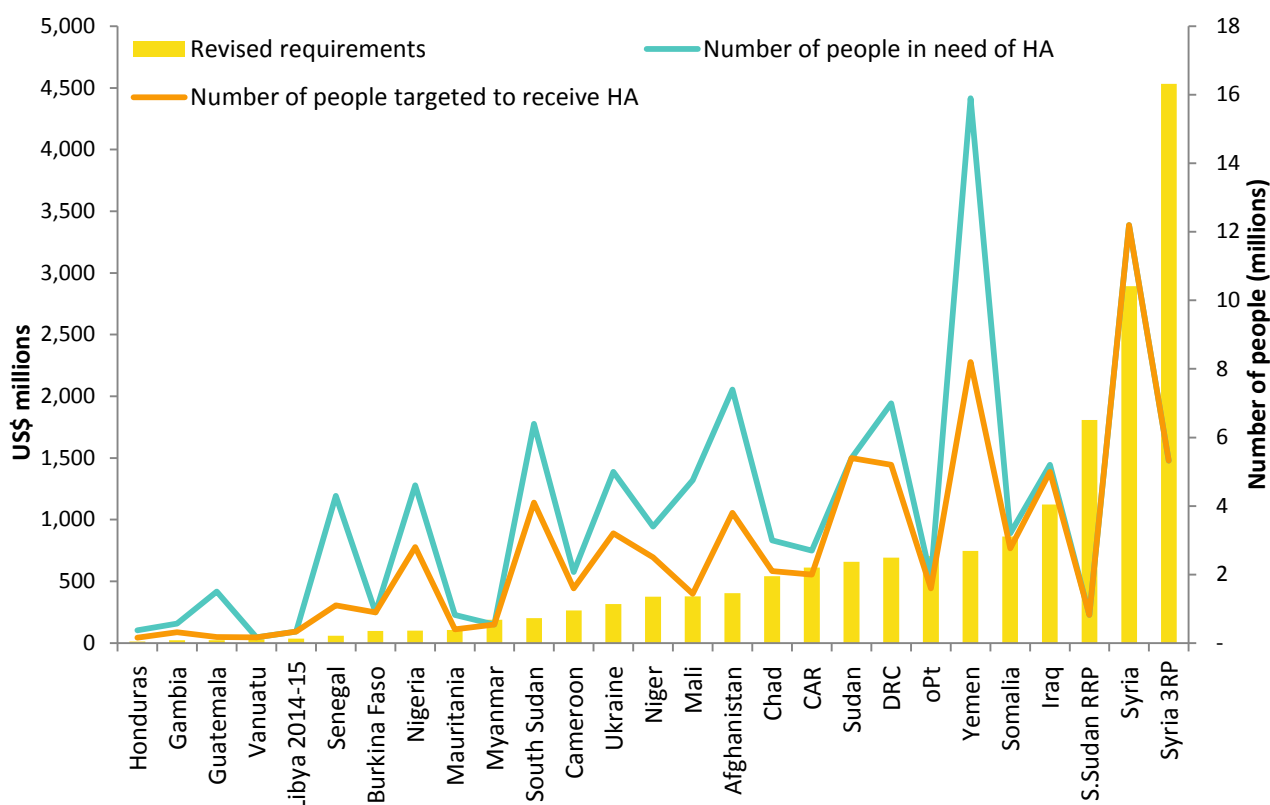
Within countries, the numbers of people estimated to require humanitarian assistance range from 166,000 people in Vanuatu compared with 15.9 million people in Yemen. However, despite the differences in absolute numbers, both examples are at the top end of the spectrum in terms of the estimated percentage of the population requiring humanitarian assistance – 65% in the case of Yemen and 66% in Vanuatu.¹⁰ Other examples include Myanmar, where around 1% (0.5 million people) of the total population of 53.2 million are estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance, and South Sudan, where an estimated 57% (6.4 million people) of the total population of 11.3 million are estimated to require humanitarian assistance.

The numbers of people targeted to receive humanitarian assistance (distinguished from the total of those in need) through UN-coordinated appeals also varies widely. For example, the SRP in Gambia targets 0.3 million people to receive humanitarian assistance (17% of the total population), compared with the Syria SRP that targets 12.2 million people (53% of the total population).

⁹ These are approximate numbers based on GHA's analysis of SRPs, CAPs and Flash Appeals in 2013 and 2014. OCHA's [World Humanitarian Data and Trends Report 2014](#) states that 73 million people were targeted to receive humanitarian assistance in 2013 through inter-agency appeals. No consolidated OCHA figure is available yet for 2014.

¹⁰ Proportions are calculated using World Bank population data from 2014.

Figure 3: Requirements, numbers of people in need and targeted to receive humanitarian assistance in UN-coordinated Appeals, 2015



Source: Development Initiatives based on UN OCHA FTS data and UN-coordinated Appeal documents.

Note: Does not include the 2015 *Ebola Outbreak: Updated overview of needs and requirements* or the 2015 CAR RRP.

In 2015 the average cost of response per person is approximately US\$251 compared with US\$205 per person in 2014 and US\$168 per person in 2013.¹¹

There are major variations in the per capita costs between individual appeals. For example, the 2015 SRP for Nigeria, which requests US\$100.2 million, aims to reach approximately 2.8 million people with humanitarian assistance at an approximate cost of US\$36 per person. Towards the other end of the spectrum, the South Sudan RRP 2015 aims to reach an estimated 0.8 million South Sudanese refugees in Uganda, Sudan, Kenya and Ethiopia at a cost of approximately US\$801 per person.

There are many complex factors influencing the cost of providing humanitarian assistance in different locations, such as the scope of appeals, access to crisis-affected populations, the availability of existing services, and the cost of procuring and transporting relief items, to name but a few. In the case of the Syria 3RP, for example, which aims to reach over 5.3 million people at an overall cost of approximately US\$4.5 billion (US\$851 per person), the appeal covers two years (2015–2016) in five neighbouring countries hosting Syrian refugees. Its scope goes beyond providing immediate assistance and incorporates a scaling-up of development assistance in line with national strategies to

¹¹ Based on data from UN OCHA FTS and UN-coordinated appeals.

cope with the crises. Financial requirements are broken down into a ‘refugee component’ and a ‘resilience component’, with the latter accounting for between a quarter and a third of the total amount requested.

Part 2: The system and the scope: what’s different about the 2015 SRPs?

Multi-year funding

There are 13 multi-year SRPs in 2015¹², soon to increase to 14 once the Djibouti multi-year SRP is released in the coming weeks. This compares with 15 multi-year SRPs in 2014¹³ and just one in 2013. In 2013, Somalia was the first and only country to launch a multi-year SRP, covering the period 2013 to 2015. Iraq newly joined the list of countries with multi-year SRPs in 2014 but has now reverted to a one-year standalone plan in 2015. Similarly, South Sudan, initially presented as a multi-year SRP at the beginning of 2014, was amended several times during 2014 to respond to the rapidly deteriorating situation and is now presented as a single-year response plan for 2015. The 13 multi-year SRPs request a combined total of US\$8.1 billion for the needs that fall within 2015 – less than half of the total amount requested in 2015 – to provide humanitarian assistance to approximately 29.4 million people.

Alternative costing

Six countries have used alternative approaches to costing within their SRPs in 2015: Afghanistan, the CAR, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Myanmar, Ukraine and Yemen. Different approaches to costing UN-coordinated appeals began with pilots in DRC and Afghanistan in 2008. Since then, various other countries have experimented with different ways of arriving at an overall amount required to meet humanitarian needs. There is no new standardised methodology behind ‘alternative costing’. Rather, each approach moves away from taking projects as the starting point and uses different methods to estimate the funding required according to the average cost of delivering essential relief goods and services to target beneficiaries, including common humanitarian services. Most of these countries no longer include project sheets in their respective response plans.

In 2014, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) commissioned an external review of ‘alternative costing’ methods. OCHA is now conducting its own more in-depth analysis of different approaches before producing new guidance on humanitarian costing.

Working with national and local actors

In keeping with a general shift in humanitarian discussions towards greater recognition of the role of the state in the humanitarian response (as demonstrated in the World Humanitarian Summit consultations), the majority of SRPs include a description of existing national and local capacity to respond to humanitarian needs – mainly government actors, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations. In some cases the identification of relevant national and local actors goes further to include the private sector. In Mauritania, for example, the SRP identifies the importance of working closely with the banking industry, mining companies, and cell phone organisations, given their key role in responding to previous emergencies.

¹² Burkino Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Sahel Regional, Senegal, Somalia, Yemen, Syria 3RP.

¹³ The same countries listed above for 2014 plus Iraq and South Sudan.

In some SRPs in conflict settings where access to affected populations is limited and adherence to humanitarian principles is key (such as the SRP for Syria) references to humanitarian actors working with the government are limited to bureaucratic interactions, intended to improve humanitarian access, facilitate the issuing of visas and residence permits, or expedite customs clearance and the internal movement of goods and personnel. Similarly the 2015 SRP for DRC articulates the need to liaise with government actors whilst simultaneously retaining a measure of distance to safeguard perceptions of humanitarian independence and neutrality from the role of the UN stabilisation mission and of government armed forces in conflict-affected areas.

In non-conflict settings, where there is less sensitivity around working closely with local and national authorities, many SRPs demonstrate a genuine effort to engage and partner with national and local actors. International and national coordination structures are often closely aligned and in some cases merged. In Gambia, for example, government ministries jointly co-lead clusters/sectors together with UN agencies and international NGOs. Similarly, national and international information management systems in Gambia maximise the use of common sectoral data for joint response planning and monitoring purposes. As explored below, the Syria 3RP was developed in conjunction with the national plans of the major refugee hosting countries.

Linking with development approaches

SRPs increasingly articulate the links between humanitarian action and development approaches. Resilience has become a key theme, albeit interpreted differently throughout the SRPs. It takes the form of integrating information on risks and vulnerabilities into both humanitarian and development analysis and planning frameworks (e.g. in Cameroon); early warning systems and responses (e.g. in Nigeria); building the capacity of national actors (e.g. in Niger); and an overall recognition of the key role of development partners and affected communities themselves in promoting policies and investments to reduce the vulnerability of crisis-affected people (e.g. the Sahel region).

Some SRPs describe contexts where humanitarian actors are well established due to the protracted nature of emergencies and seek to engage their development counterparts in order to help break the cycle of crisis. In Afghanistan, for example, the SRP makes a strong call for development agencies to include activities in their multi-year frameworks that will reduce the continued need for humanitarian assistance. Other SRPs illustrate the difficulties faced by humanitarians as relative newcomers into situations that have only recently deteriorated into humanitarian crises. In Nigeria, for example, the SRP recognises the relatively minor humanitarian footprint in the country compared with development actors. It stresses the urgent need to boost the presence of humanitarian actors in order to ensure a cohesive response to escalating conflict in the north-east of the country whilst simultaneously strengthening resilience against widespread food insecurity, malnutrition and disease.

Common frameworks are sometimes used to agree joint priorities and delineate humanitarian and development activities. In Somalia, for example, an element of the previous year's SRP has been removed from the 2015 version, lowering the cost in the process, since it is now covered by development actors and incorporated into the 'New Deal' framework for Somalia.¹⁴ It is hoped that

¹⁴ The "New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States" was developed to better manage risks, increase the use of country systems, and increase the predictability of aid. Somalia is one of a number of countries where donors commit to helping fragile and conflict-affected states transition out of fragility. The New Deal framework for

initiatives focused mainly on strengthening community-level resilience will now be taken forward within development programmes, allowing humanitarian organizations to refocus their programmes on the immediate life-saving needs of people affected by disasters and conflict.

The Syria 3RP, perhaps of all the SRPs in 2015, best illustrates the centrality of national ownership and resilience in response to crises. Its entire structure and approach acknowledges the social and economic impact of hosting Syrian refugees on Syria's neighbours and seeks to align international support for refugee and resilience initiatives with national plans and existing local and national capacities. In its own words, the Syria 3RP "*champions the resilience approach and has increased the share of resilience-related activities in the regional response by 300% compared to previous plans.*"

Gender

Most of the 2015 SRPs make reference to gender as a key cross-cutting issue. However, descriptions of how gender sensitivity is mainstreamed within humanitarian response are limited. A number of SRPs (e.g. South Sudan) identify the lack of sex- and age-disaggregated data as a limiting factor and seek to include a stronger gender analysis within all needs assessments in 2015. Others (e.g. Nigeria) describe the need to build capacity amongst humanitarian actors in gender-sensitive programming. The 'gender marker' is referenced in several SRPs (e.g. Somalia) as a way of helping clusters prioritise projects that deliver appropriately targeted services for men, women, boys and girls.

Innovation

A number of innovative approaches are described within the 2015 SRPs to respond to the challenges of providing an effective and efficient humanitarian response. Efforts to better target humanitarian action and prioritise areas where funding is most urgently required are a common theme as the gap between needs and available resources grows.

Within the context of the Syria 3RP, targeting tools in Lebanon such as the Digital Atlas and Municipal Risk Mapping allow humanitarian actors to geo-reference needs and identify response gaps, thereby improving the targeting of humanitarian assistance according to unmet needs. In Iraq, where access to affected populations is severely limited, community feedback is gathered through two-way communication centres and is fed back to clusters to allow them to adapt to changing needs and analyse longer term trends. In CAR, a Rapid Response Mechanism triggered by sudden deterioration of the situation in a particular area, immediately leads to the deployment of a pre-financed multi-sectoral needs assessment team. Clusters then validate the assessment findings and determine how best to meet the needs, supported by pre-positioned stocks to fill gaps in the capacity of humanitarian organisations to respond.

Cash and voucher programming continues to feature strongly within this year's SRPs. The Syria 3RP, for example, describes a widespread and coordinated approach to implement unconditional multi-purpose cash assistance or emergency financial assistance to over 1.3 million people. Agencies in Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt are seeking to harmonize cash approaches through UNHCR's Refugee Assistance Information System, which tracks assistance by individual case to prevent gaps and/or duplication. In Ukraine, the SRP provides details of cash assistance by means of debit cards and vouchers in areas not directly affected by the conflict.

Somalia was agreed in 2014 and is expected to become operational in 2015. See www.newdeal.so for more details.

Conclusion

2015 once again presents humanitarian agencies and donors with the severe challenge of meeting humanitarian needs at an unprecedented scale and raises ongoing questions of how to prioritise within and between appeals. The 2015 SRPs begin to help decision makers to understand and meet these challenges through better and more comparable data on needs; planning timelines that are better suited to the protracted nature of many crises; more links (albeit nominal in some cases) with development and national plans; and new and interesting approaches to working in complex and unstable environments.

However, the SRPs in 2015 also raise a number of questions related to monitoring of the international humanitarian response. Multi-year appeals are not yet accompanied by a mechanism for systematically tracking multi-year commitments and funding by donors. References to development approaches within the SRPs are welcome but reporting systems are not set up to facilitate tracking of funding against these development frameworks. Alternative costing of appeals is a step forward. However, it also raises questions about how to track funding against specific sectors or projects, or monitor progress on gender given the current project-orientated nature of the 'gender marker' tool.

We will continue to look into these and other issues in this year's GHA Report, the findings of which will be shared in June 2015.