



Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development by members of the Humanitarian Policy and Advocacy Group

The Humanitarian Policy and Advocacy Group (HPAG) is an interagency working group that seeks to facilitate coordination, discussion, and consultation within the humanitarian sector and with Global Affairs Canada (GAC) on shared priorities and challenges around humanitarian policy and advocacy.

The HPAG is coordinated by the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC).

As some of Canada's leading civil society organizations working with the Canadian government and other partners in humanitarian response worldwide, we welcome the decision of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development to study the situations in Somalia, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). We prepared this submission to identify core contextual elements and recommendations for consideration by the committee. This submission is intended to highlight areas of common points and priorities from across the humanitarian community. It complements, and does not replace, submissions by individual organizations.

Members of the Humanitarian Policy and Advocacy Group would welcome an opportunity to elaborate on the points below through in-person testimony to the committee.

Recommendations

1. The Government of Canada should maintain, and strongly consider increasing, current levels of humanitarian assistance to Somalia, South Sudan and the DRC.
2. The Government of Canada should be guided in each context by needs and vulnerability assessments that consider the differentiated impacts of crises on people based on gender, age, disability, and ethnic or religious affiliation, among other factors. These assessments should also consider how needs-based investments can maximize long-term impact. For example, double discrimination based on age and gender helps render adolescent girls one of the most vulnerable populations in the world. Yet evidence shows that when adolescent girls are educated, healthy, safe and empowered, they transform not only their own lives but their families and communities too.
3. The Government of Canada should use a variety of modalities in its response to these contexts, ranging from rapid response mechanisms to multi-year flexible interventions, and work to expedite the approval process for humanitarian responses – with a goal of less than five months.

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4. The Government of Canada should prioritize gender-transformative programming, in accordance with the Feminist International Assistance Policy, including by engaging and consulting women and girls in decision-making, funding efforts to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence, and providing life-saving health services, including comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) information and services.
5. The Government of Canada should build on its multilateral leadership in the protection and advancement of children’s rights, through initiatives such as the *Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers* and the *G7 Charlevoix Declaration on Quality Education for Girls, Adolescent Girls and Women in Developing Countries*. This should include prioritizing accountability for crimes committed against children; ensuring child protection is adequately funded in humanitarian response, peace operations, and post-conflict reconstruction efforts, including access to age-appropriate safe spaces; funding programs to address the barriers to education and the drivers of child, early, and forced marriage; and contributing to child rights monitoring and reporting in UN missions.
6. The Government of Canada should be guided by the principle of “as localized as possible, as international as necessary.” This includes building capacity of local actors on the ground and increasing support for local, national or regional organizations, notably including women’s rights organizations and national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, that continue to respond when international actors cannot access affected areas. Cash-based interventions are another way of empowering local people and enhancing their dignity.
7. The Government of Canada should use its diplomatic assets to protect and promote humanitarian access to areas affected by protracted crises. This includes supporting collective action by humanitarian actors and the donor community to overcome systemic access issues, support local access negotiations, and build risk management capacity among local partners.
8. The Government of Canada should provide support for free, fair, credible, and democratic elections; inclusive peace agreements; security sector reform; initiatives to address corruption and other economic drivers of conflict; and good governance at local, national and regional levels that could help to avert massive humanitarian crises. Humanitarian crises require political solutions.

Key Humanitarian Context

- The humanitarian context continues to deteriorate in all three countries. Multiple destabilizing crises are emerging in sequence or at the same time, including protracted armed conflicts, food insecurity, epidemics such as cholera and Ebola, high rates of sexual and gender-based violence, acute disasters such as floods, and criminality fueled by weakening or non-existent economies.
- Even with this instability, Canadian humanitarian organizations have a significant presence in all three countries, often drawing on longstanding local partnerships. For example, the Canadian Red Cross has an existing partnership with the National Red Cross of DRC which allowed them to scale up programming to respond to the recent Ebola outbreak in Equateur Province, and is partnered with the Somali Red Crescent to build response capacity for anticipated cholera outbreaks.

- The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is increasing, placing additional pressures on local or bordering host populations. DRC is the country with the largest number of IDPs in Africa. The South Sudanese displacement crisis is the largest in Africa and the third largest in the world; almost 90 per cent of those displaced are reportedly women and children.
- These contexts continue to receive inadequate support from the international community. Public interest and support tends to wane for these protracted crises, and flexible, longer-term funding is hard to obtain through philanthropic channels. This makes national donor support critical. Yet as of mid-year the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan for the DRC was just 21% funded, and the annual humanitarian appeal for South Sudan was only 41% funded.
- Nutrition and food security support is urgently needed in all three contexts. Malnutrition rates in Somalia remain among the worst in the world, with nearly a million children under five projected to be acutely malnourished in 2019. In South Sudan, an Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) report in September 2018 estimated that 6.1 million people (more than half the population) face Crisis and Emergency acute food insecurity – a 60% increase from 2017.
- All three countries have alarming levels of grave violations against children in conflict, including killing, maiming, abduction, rape and other sexual violence, and forcible recruitment and use by armed groups. This represents a failure of the international community to protect some of the world’s most vulnerable girls and boys from extreme violence, suffering, exploitation and abuse.
- At least 2.2 million school-aged children are estimated to be out of school in South Sudan, and the number has increased in recent years. Girls are more likely than boys to be excluded from education – in some parts of South Sudan, over 75% of primary-aged girls are not in school. Hundreds of schools have been attacked across the three countries, predominantly in the DRC, and thousands of children have been recruited or used by armed groups.
- Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is a critical threat to the protection and wellbeing of women and children. In South Sudan, up to 65 per cent of women and girls have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. The risk of child, early, and forced marriage remains constant due to conflict and economic crisis. Severe food insecurity and economic crisis forces women and girls to walk further to forage for food, firewood and other necessities to survive, exposing them to greater risk of rape, abduction for the purposes of sexual slavery and other forms of SGBV. In DRC, sexual violence towards women, girls, men and boys in areas of conflict is exacerbated by the impunity of warlords and militia groups that control the villages.
- Ongoing conflict and insecurity are contributing to protracted crisis situations that will not be resolved quickly, creating risks for both local populations and the humanitarian workers working to support and assist them. Delivery of humanitarian aid into the most fragile contexts in all three countries is constrained by the instability of the operating environment. In South Sudan, for example, risks to aid workers include shooting and other attacks, detention, looting and vandalism of humanitarian property, denial of access through roadblocks, and threats and harassment. The vast majority of aid workers victimized by violence in humanitarian contexts are national staff.

