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## ENGAGEMENT OF HELVETAS IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

**Multiple and recurrent disasters affect the particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, pushing them further into poverty and distress. Helvetas responds to these disaster-struck victims in its partner countries to support them in order to rebuild their lives.**

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number, intensity and scale of natural disasters in developing countries. Fragility and conflict affect many of the same countries, exacerbating humanitarian needs and leading to protracted crises.

Disasters always have multiple and interconnected causes and effects related to natural and social phenomena, such as climate change, mismanagement of natural resources and socio-political factors. The devastating impact of such events often reverses decades of development efforts. This is the reason why Helvetas steps in and helps the affected people recover and rebuild their lives and livelihoods.

Helvetas works in 30 partner countries and has provided humanitarian assistance after major disasters for decades. Since 2015, Helvetas has been engaging in humanitarian response in a systematic way, aiming at resilience building – a crucial element for a sustainable and dignified present and future. Hence, our interventions connect humanitarian response and development through preparedness, rapid response capacities, expertise and innovative approaches; easing the transition from relief to development.

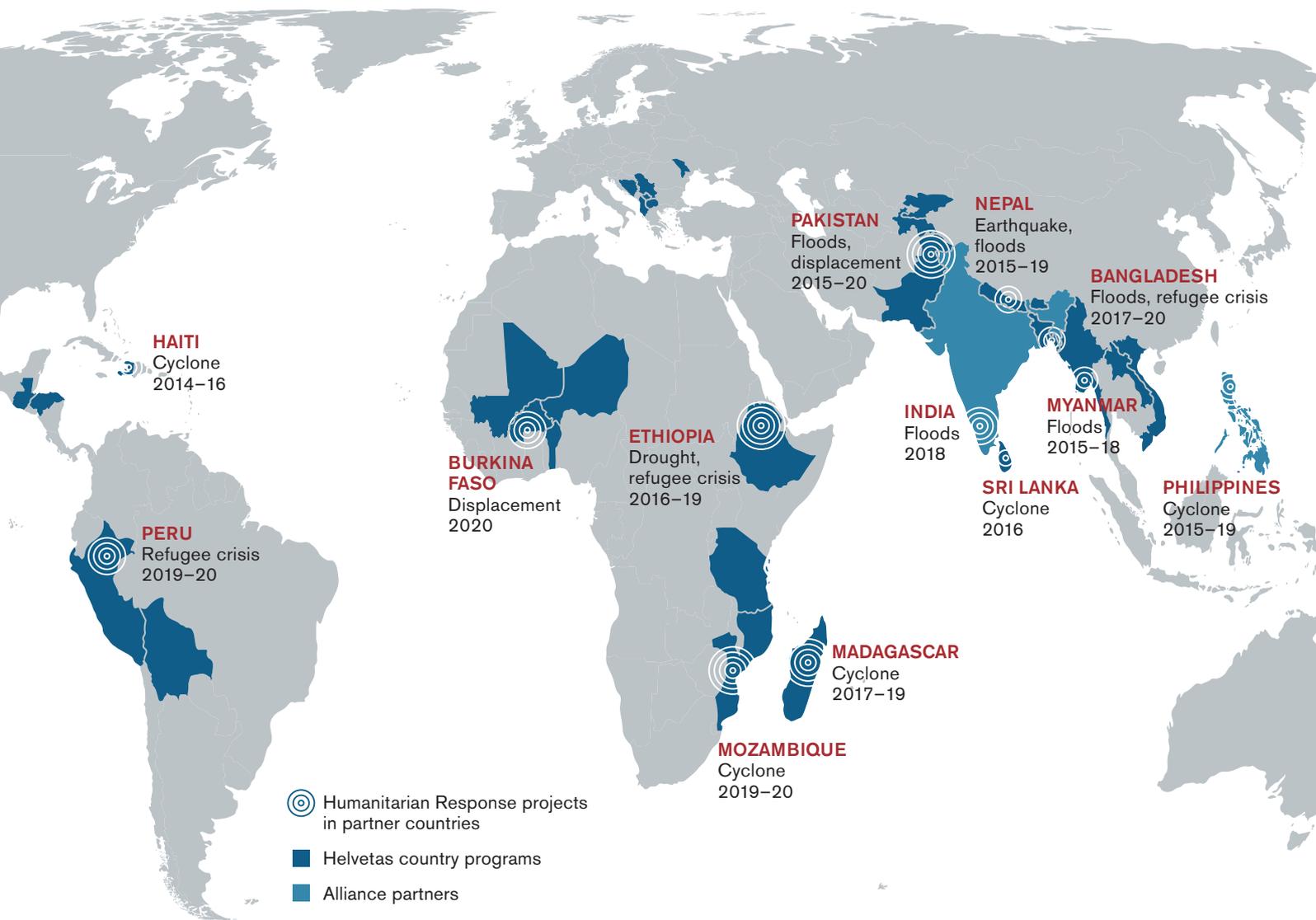
For this purpose, we use a systemic approach that supports local actors, production systems and service mechanisms. The actions are aimed to meet the needs of marginalized and vulnerable people who are most affected both by natural and human-induced disasters.

## OUR HUMANITARIAN RESPONSES

As of today, Helvetas has implemented 32 projects in 12 countries. A snapshot of these projects and the locations of implementation is provided in the map below.

**Range of interventions:** Depending on the different situations and crises, our humanitarian response interventions have included the areas of: water, sanitation and hygiene, food security, livelihoods, camp management, skills development and education, shelter, protection/governance, disaster risk management and construction.

### Helvetas partner countries and humanitarian response interventions since 2015



## WORKING APPROACH AND PRINCIPLES

Our humanitarian responses are based on long-standing thematic expertise.

**Building on our competencies:** For many years now, we have been engaging in projects related to Environment and Climate Change, particularly in the area of Disaster Risk Management (DRM), with communities, local governments and private sector partners. We have been providing support to improve their capacities and institutionalize DRM. This means anticipating a disaster; and elaborating and implementing strategies and action plans to prevent, mitigate and prepare for disaster and crisis events. Hence, when designing and implementing humanitarian responses, Helvetas' core competencies come to the fore. These include: water and infrastructure, food security, governance and peace, and skill development and education.

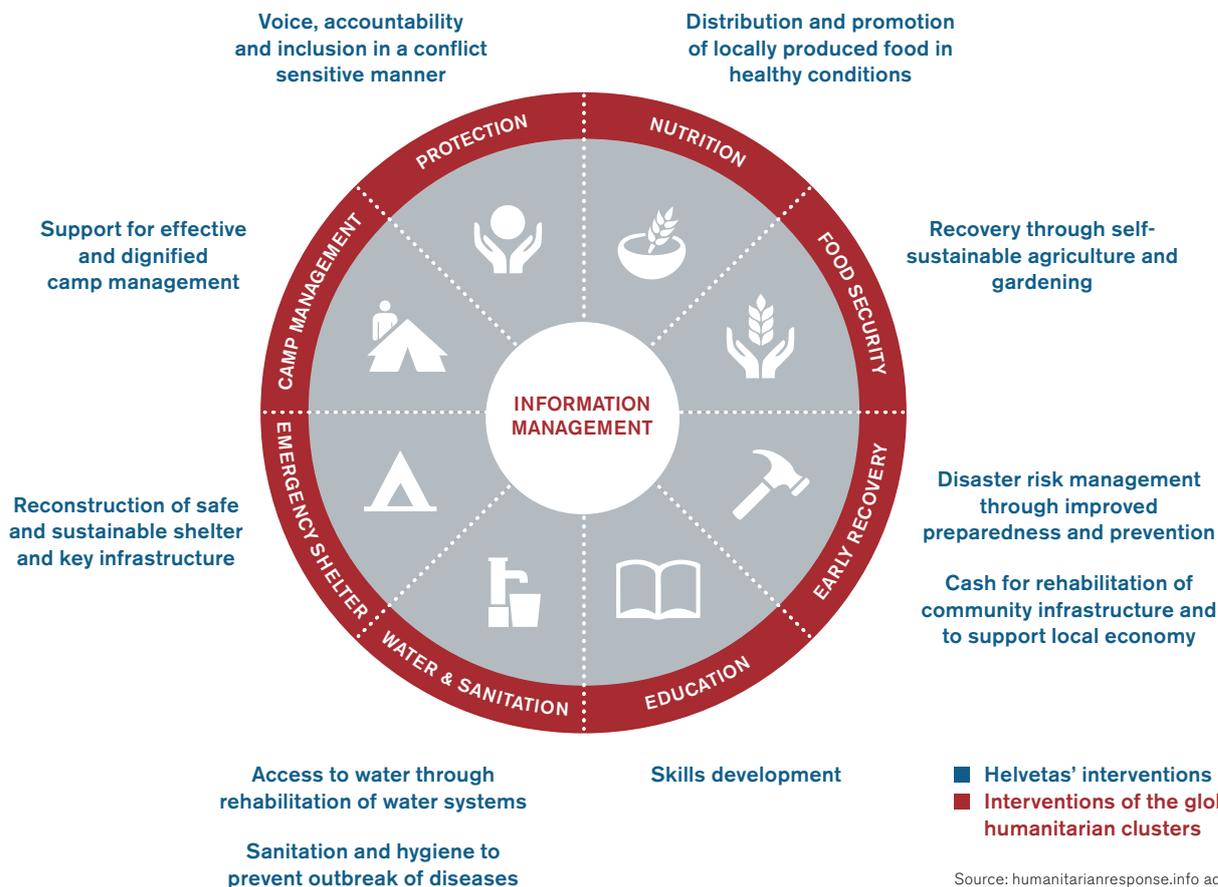
**Embedding into the geography:** We intervene primarily in our partner countries in collaboration with relevant actors within these countries. The presence of a close partner ensures effective and needs-based response. At the operational level, our country offices are in the leading role for any intervention. They are strategically and thematically supported by a close collaboration with experts from the head office.

**Fostering local capacities:** We systematically develop institutional humanitarian response competences by preparing our own staff and the local staff in our partner countries. This leads to the further strengthening of national and local actors in their roles and functions. In future, this will be enhanced through regional humanitarian response coordinators, who will lead interventions in close collaboration with the head office, local teams and partners.

**Coordinating and partnering:** We foster a regular exchange with humanitarian networks, thematic working groups, national and global clusters, governmental institutions and national partners. We strive to learn from experienced humanitarian partners on the ground, including Alliance2015 members, Swiss NGOs and other international or national NGOs and institutions.

**Focusing on the humanitarian-development nexus aligned with international commitments:** Based on the 'Grand Bargain' principles ([www.agendaforhumanity.org](http://www.agendaforhumanity.org)), we focus on strengthening the nexus between humanitarian aid and development. We respond to humanitarian situations through systemic collaboration with relevant institutions and actors, working with approaches that transform disaster victims into proactive partners.

## Helvetas' interventions and their alignment with the global humanitarian coordination system



## FROM APPROACH TO ACTION

### **Nepal: Building capacities to build back better**

After the devastating earthquakes in April and May, 2015, together with local and Swiss partners, Helvetas supported the rural and urban communities in Sindhupalchok district to rebuild their lives.

From 2015 to 2019, multiple projects covered the overlapping phases from early response, recovery, reconstruction, rehabilitation and development. We first responded by way of distributing non-food items such as hygiene kits, shelter material, seeds. People were supported to reconstruct their livelihoods, houses and community infrastructures like irrigation channels, water supply, water mills, schools. Thereafter, we focused our initiatives at long-term improvement such as house reconstruction, by setting better standards for the design of houses and capacity development. A curriculum was created for the local masons. Government technicians were supported for improved quality and participatory reconstruction management. This involvement illustrates our work at the humanitarian-development nexus that has led to the rebuilding of 783 houses.

### **Bangladesh: Innovation for refugees and local communities**

Helvetas has been active in Bangladesh for close to two decades. And since 2017, we have been providing emergency relief to the Rohingya refugees.

We believe that it is important to establish a degree of normalcy in the lives of the refugees, who have lost their homes, fields and markets. For this reason, we intervene through 9 projects, in cooperation with local and international partners from Alliance2015. Today, our interventions have grown into a humanitarian portfolio, which allows for synergies and effective collaboration to help over 150,000 people.

Our interventions have been based on in-depth knowledge of local agriculture and the local conditions. For example, we promote access to healthy food through fresh food vouchers and by providing seeds, tools, etc., and along with training to host communities and refugees to set up family gardens. The inclusion of refugees and host communities is crucial for peaceful cohabitation and contributes to social cohesion.

In another example, we developed and promoted need-based innovative measures such as the construction of 320 latrines for around 10,000 people. The latrines generate biogas, which is further used to generate energy for communal kitchens.

Based on the two interventions mentioned above, the combining of sanitation facilities with hygiene courses



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"We'll finally feel safe in our new house. After all, another quake can hit anytime." Daulima Sherpa (40), a farmer and earthquake victim trained in building quakeproof houses.

has led to the prevention of contamination of drinking water and the spread of diseases like cholera.

For UNHCR, Helvetas and its partners are responsible for the management of three camps with a total of 120,000 residents (status as of 2019). The aim is to improve the exchange of information between the communities and the different organizations represented in the camps in order to optimize the efficiency of relief measures.

### **Mozambique: Ensuring resilient water supply, sanitation and hygiene**

After Cyclone Kenneth devastated Northern Mozambique in April 2019; Helvetas, in collaboration with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, UNICEF and SolidarMed, responded swiftly to support emergency water supply at two accommodation centers in Pemba town and to distribute hygiene and dignity kits in selected districts.

In close collaboration with a local partner, Helvetas ensured that the shallow wells were cleaned, disinfected and restored in four districts. It aided the installation of new hand pumps and the construction of boreholes for safe water. The affected communities were supported in the construction/reconstruction of their latrines. Prevention of an outbreak of cholera was crucial from the



Cox's Bazaar Refugee Camp: \*Sharmin Begum explains to the other women at the camp how to grow their own vegetables.

\*Name has been changed to protect identity

very beginning and Helvetas collaborated closely with health authorities to be prepared for a potential outbreak. In terms of hygiene and sanitation, some localities are now better equipped for future events like these. At the same time, Helvetas and its partners have gained valuable knowledge and experience to support these communities effectively and efficiently.

### **Ethiopia – From Famine Relief to Resilient Food Systems**

Years of involvement in the Wag-Hemra region of rural Ethiopia shows that even in vulnerable contexts of food crises, community resilience can be fostered through a set of measures that complement each other, linking humanitarian assistance with long-term development in acute crises.

To overcome the chronic food insecurity and repeated relief aid in Wag-Hemra, since 2013, Helvetas has combined a set of measures to enhance the resilience of local food systems through a close collaboration with government and community-based institutions. Natural resources management and adapted agricultural practices were key entry points to resilience building and

included hillside farming on bench terraces, moisture conservation tillage, controlled grazing and fodder production, roof water harvesting and homestead gardening.

In 2015–2016, a severe drought hit the region. To support the communities in absorbing this shock without undermining livelihood assets, and to restart their lives after the crisis, Helvetas provided drinking water, livestock and seed as relief measure.

This work was carried out through cash transfer and cash for work in the rehabilitation of assets and infrastructure. Most importantly, the entire zone's administrative establishment, extension services, the civil society and local small businesses engaged in implementing this development and relief work. This has enhanced knowledge and experience among these key actors in the region and built a promising basis for continued, institutionalized resilience building of food systems and livelihoods.



Ethiopia: Improving the resilience of farming systems, Wag Hemra

## References

### Get more information on Helvetas Engagement in Humanitarian Response:

[helvetas.org/humanitarian-response](http://helvetas.org/humanitarian-response)

Helvetas Services in Humanitarian Response:

[helvetas.org/emergency-expert](http://helvetas.org/emergency-expert)

Disaster Risk Management at Helvetas

[helvetas.org/Publications-PDFs/workingfield\\_disasterriskmanagement\\_a4\\_4.pdf](http://helvetas.org/Publications-PDFs/workingfield_disasterriskmanagement_a4_4.pdf)

### For more information on the Humanitarian Response efforts and our impact, please read the following articles:

- Our work in Nepal after the earthquakes in April and May 2015: Fresh start after the earthquake at:

[helvetas.org/nepal-earthquake-relief](http://helvetas.org/nepal-earthquake-relief)

The Humanitarian – Development nexus: Lessons learned from the 2015 Nepal earthquake at:

[helvetas.org/Publications-PDFs/Asia/Nepal/Country%20specific%20publications/learning%20series/Humanitarian%20Development%20Nexus%20Learning%20Series%20Nepal.pdf](http://helvetas.org/Publications-PDFs/Asia/Nepal/Country%20specific%20publications/learning%20series/Humanitarian%20Development%20Nexus%20Learning%20Series%20Nepal.pdf)

- On the Rohingya Refugee Crisis:

In English: [helvetas.org/rohingya-refugee-crisis](http://helvetas.org/rohingya-refugee-crisis)

In German: [helvetas.org/gruen-ist-die-hoffnung](http://helvetas.org/gruen-ist-die-hoffnung)

- Our response to the cyclone in Mozambique:

[helvetas.org/cyclone-mecufi](http://helvetas.org/cyclone-mecufi)

- Our involvement in Ethiopia:

Experience Capitalisation Enhancing climate resilience in semi-arid regions in Northern Ethiopia:

[helvetas.org/Publications-PDFs/Switzerland/Climate-change/Ethiopia\\_mainpub\\_2018\\_en.pdf](http://helvetas.org/Publications-PDFs/Switzerland/Climate-change/Ethiopia_mainpub_2018_en.pdf)

In German on the EDA Politorbis (p.115):

[www.eda.admin.ch/dam/eda/mehrsprachig/documents/publications/Politorbis/politorbis-66\\_dfe.pdf](http://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/eda/mehrsprachig/documents/publications/Politorbis/politorbis-66_dfe.pdf)

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