

Strategic Misalignment in Protracted Humanitarian Operations and Its Implications for Funding Sustainability and Organizational Capacity

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Abstract:

Protracted humanitarian operations have become a defining feature of the contemporary global crisis landscape, driven by prolonged conflicts, climate-related disasters, forced displacement, and fragile governance structures. While humanitarian organizations were historically designed for short-term emergency response, many are now operating in chronic crisis contexts that last for decades. This shift has exposed a growing phenomenon of strategic misalignment, where organizational mandates, funding mechanisms, operational models, and stakeholder expectations are no longer coherently aligned. This article critically examines the nature of strategic misalignment in protracted humanitarian operations and analyzes its implications for funding sustainability and organizational capacity. Drawing on organizational theory, humanitarian governance literature, and funding architecture analysis, the study argues that unresolved strategic misalignment undermines long-term financial viability, erodes institutional learning, weakens staff capacity, and reduces programmatic effectiveness. The article concludes by proposing an integrated strategic realignment framework aimed at enhancing sustainability, adaptability, and mission coherence in long-term humanitarian engagement.

Keywords: *Protracted Humanitarian Crises, Strategic Misalignment, Funding Sustainability, Organizational Capacity, Humanitarian Governance*

1. Introduction

Humanitarian action has undergone a fundamental transformation over the past three decades. Conflicts in regions such as the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, and parts of South Asia, combined with climate-induced disasters, forced displacement, and political instability, have produced crises that persist far beyond the traditional emergency phase. According to global humanitarian assessments, the average duration of displacement now exceeds two decades, while humanitarian appeals increasingly rely on multi-year response frameworks rather than short-term emergency plans (Son et al., 2025). Despite this shift, many humanitarian organizations continue to operate using strategies, structures, and funding mechanisms originally designed for acute and time-bound emergencies. This growing temporal mismatch has exposed a persistent condition of strategic misalignment. Strategic misalignment refers to the lack of coherence between organizational mission, long-term strategic objectives, operational practices, funding architectures, and stakeholder expectations (Corbett et al., 2022). In protracted humanitarian contexts, misalignment is not episodic but structural, embedded in governance systems, donor relations, and performance measurement regimes. Organizations are increasingly required to pursue long-term outcomes such as resilience, self-reliance, and systems strengthening, while remaining constrained by emergency-oriented mandates, short funding cycles, and compliance-driven accountability requirements (Narayanan & Altay, 2024).

The consequences of this misalignment are far-reaching. At the programmatic level, interventions may prioritize short-term outputs over sustainable impact. At the organizational level, misalignment undermines institutional learning, weakens staff morale, and erodes operational capacity. At the system level, donor fatigue, fragmented coordination, and declining legitimacy threaten the sustainability of humanitarian financing. These challenges raise critical questions about the long-term viability of humanitarian action in protracted crises (Qaddour et al., 2025). The purpose of this article is threefold. First, it conceptualizes strategic misalignment within the context of protracted humanitarian operations. Second, it examines the implications of misalignment for funding sustainability and organizational capacity. Third, it proposes strategic realignment pathways that can enhance coherence, adaptability, and long-term effectiveness. By synthesizing insights from previous studies across humanitarian governance, organizational theory, and nonprofit management, this article contributes to ongoing debates on how humanitarian actors can remain effective in an era of chronic crisis. This debate is particularly salient given the evolving expectations placed on humanitarian organizations by donors, affected communities, and global policy frameworks. Initiatives such as the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus and the localization agenda have explicitly called for more integrated, sustainable, and locally led responses to long-term crises (Plesner, 2025). However, existing evidence suggests that many organizations struggle to translate these normative commitments into operational reality. The persistence of siloed funding streams, sectoral fragmentation, and centralized decision-making often reinforces short-termism, thereby deepening strategic misalignment rather than resolving it (Gureh & Ondara, 2024).

Furthermore, protracted humanitarian operations are increasingly shaped by complex political economies. Donor priorities are influenced by geopolitical interests, domestic political pressures, and risk management concerns, which can constrain humanitarian autonomy and strategic choice. As a result, organizations may adapt their strategies to align with donor incentives rather than contextual needs, leading to mission drift and weakened accountability to affected populations. This dynamic raises important ethical and managerial dilemmas regarding whose priorities ultimately shape humanitarian action in long-term crisis settings (Kaźmierczak et al., 2025).

The implications of strategic misalignment also extend to the internal functioning of humanitarian organizations. Prolonged reliance on emergency-oriented systems can inhibit innovation, discourage long-term investment, and perpetuate cycles of staff precarity and organizational instability. Over time, these conditions erode institutional resilience and reduce the capacity of organizations to adapt to evolving crisis dynamics. In this sense, strategic misalignment should be understood not merely as a technical or managerial challenge, but as a systemic risk to the sustainability of humanitarian action itself (Akinbi & Oluwole, 2025). Against this backdrop, there is a growing need for analytically grounded research that moves beyond descriptive accounts of protracted crises to examine the underlying organizational and structural factors that shape humanitarian performance over time (Kurniawan, 2025). By focusing explicitly on strategic misalignment, this article seeks to address this gap and provide a more nuanced understanding of how funding architectures, governance arrangements, and organizational practices interact in prolonged humanitarian settings. Such an understanding is essential for informing both scholarly debate and practical reform efforts aimed at enhancing the long-term effectiveness and legitimacy of humanitarian action.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Protracted Humanitarian Operations: Concept and Characteristics

Protracted humanitarian operations refer to sustained humanitarian engagement in contexts where crises persist for extended periods, often without a clear political settlement or transition to recovery and development. These contexts are typically characterized by recurrent conflict, weak or contested state authority, chronic poverty, climate vulnerability, and large-scale displacement. Unlike sudden-onset emergencies, protracted crises evolve slowly, creating enduring humanitarian needs that blur the boundaries between relief, recovery, and development (Al Maalouf et al., 2025). One defining characteristic of protracted humanitarian operations is the institutionalization of emergency response mechanisms. According to Henriksen (2024), coordination structures, funding appeals, and implementation modalities designed for short-term response often become semi-permanent. Humanitarian organizations may operate in the same locations for decades, delivering services such as healthcare, education, water, sanitation, and protection that would normally fall within the remit of state institutions. These dynamic risks normalizing humanitarian substitution for governance, while simultaneously constraining opportunities for sustainable transition.

According to Talisuna et al. (2025), protracted humanitarian operations represent a distinct and increasingly prevalent form of humanitarian engagement, characterized by long-term crisis conditions and sustained external assistance. Unlike short-term emergency responses, these operations unfold in complex environments where humanitarian actors must navigate persistent instability, evolving needs, and blurred boundaries between relief, recovery, and development. The figure below provides a conceptual visualization of the defining features and systemic dynamics that shape protracted humanitarian operations.

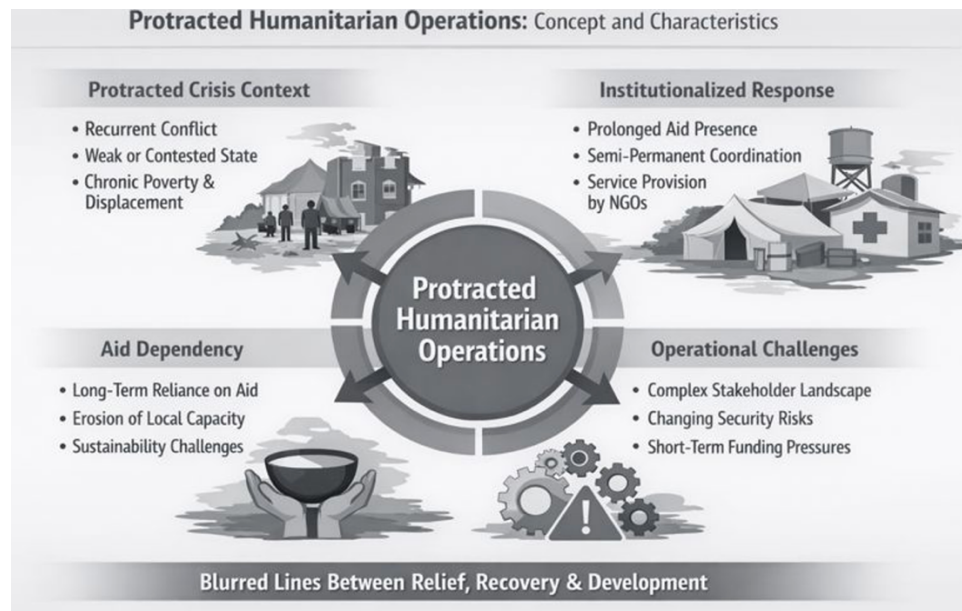


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Protracted Humanitarian Operations and Their Core Characteristics

The figure illustrates protracted humanitarian operations as a central, interconnected system influenced by four core dimensions. At the center of the framework lies Protracted Humanitarian Operations, representing sustained humanitarian engagement over extended periods. Surrounding this core are four interrelated components that collectively define the operational environment (Singh, 2025). First, the Protracted Crisis Context highlights the structural conditions underpinning prolonged humanitarian needs, including recurrent conflict, weak or contested state authority, chronic poverty, and large-scale displacement. These conditions prevent durable political and developmental solutions, necessitating long-term humanitarian involvement (Elmakki, 2025).

Second, Institutionalized Humanitarian Response captures the normalization of emergency mechanisms over time. Coordination systems, funding appeals, and service delivery models initially designed for short-term crises become semi-permanent. Humanitarian organizations often assume roles typically associated with state institutions, such as healthcare and education provision, which can stabilize communities while simultaneously limiting pathways toward sustainable transition (Shaheen et al., 2024). Third, Aid Dependency reflects the long-term reliance of affected populations on external assistance. Repeated cycles of humanitarian aid, in the absence of political or economic resolution, risk eroding local capacities and reinforcing structural vulnerability. This dimension underscores the ethical and strategic tension between immediate life-saving assistance and the promotion of long-term self-reliance (Thakur-Weigold et al., 2025). Fourth, Operational Challenges represent the organizational pressures faced by humanitarian actors, including complex stakeholder landscapes, fluctuating security conditions, and short-term funding constraints. These challenges complicate strategic planning and hinder the ability to measure and achieve long-term outcomes (Shaheen et al., 2024).

According to Gooding et al. (2022), the figure is framed by the concept of blurred boundaries between relief, recovery, and development, emphasizing the central dilemma of protracted humanitarian operations. Together, these interacting dimensions create an environment in which traditional humanitarian models struggle to remain aligned with long-term realities, thereby setting the stage for strategic misalignment and sustainability challenges explored in this study.

Another key feature is long-term aid dependency among affected populations. Repeated cycles of humanitarian assistance, delivered without corresponding political or economic solutions, can reinforce structural vulnerability. While humanitarian aid remains essential for survival, its prolonged provision raises concerns about sustainability, local capacity erosion, and social resilience (Geremedhn & Gebrihet, 2024). Humanitarian organizations must therefore navigate a complex ethical and strategic terrain, balancing immediate life-saving imperatives with longer-term development aspirations. These characteristics place significant strain on humanitarian organizations. Operational complexity increases as stakeholders multiply, security conditions fluctuate, and donor expectations diversify. Traditional humanitarian tools, such as short project cycles and standardized indicators, often prove ill-suited to capturing long-term change. This context provides fertile ground for strategic misalignment, as organizations struggle to reconcile inherited humanitarian models with the realities of prolonged engagement.

2.2 Conceptualizing Strategic Misalignment in Humanitarian Organizations

Strategic misalignment occurs when an organization's mission, strategic intent, operational systems, and external environment are not coherently aligned to support long-term objectives. In humanitarian organizations, misalignment often emerges from the interaction of competing institutional logics, including humanitarian principles, donor priorities, security regulations, and development-oriented expectations. In protracted crisis settings, these tensions intensify and become structurally embedded (Bahna & Szalay, 2025). At the strategic level, many humanitarian organizations articulate commitments to resilience, localization, and sustainability. However, these commitments are frequently undermined by operational realities shaped by donor-driven project cycles, rigid log frames, and output-focused reporting. As a result, strategic plans may emphasize long-term transformation, while day-to-day operations remain locked into short-term delivery modes (Patrucco et al., 2025).

Ada & Abdullahi (2022), at the governance level, misalignment is reinforced through accountability structures that prioritize compliance and risk avoidance over learning and adaptation. Boards and senior leadership often face strong incentives to minimize financial and reputational risk, discouraging experimentation or long-term investment in volatile contexts. This governance dynamic constrains strategic flexibility and reinforces path dependency. Strategic misalignment is a critical challenge for humanitarian organizations operating in protracted crisis environments, where competing institutional pressures and long-term uncertainty shape decision-making. The figure presents a conceptual model illustrating how misalignment emerges across strategic, governance, and operational levels, and how these dimensions interact to erode organizational coherence and long-term effectiveness (Tosi & Marty, 2024).



Figure 2: Conceptual Model of Strategic Misalignment in Humanitarian Organizations Operating in Protracted Crises

The figure places Strategic Misalignment at the center, representing the cumulative outcome of interacting pressures that disrupt alignment between an organization's mission and its long-term objectives. This central construct reflects the persistent gap between strategic intent and operational reality in protracted humanitarian operations (Mazuryk & Shyroкова, 2024). At the upper level, the model highlights the role of competing institutional logics, including humanitarian principles, donor priorities, security regulations, and development-oriented expectations. In protracted crises, these logics coexist and often conflict, creating contradictory incentives that shape organizational strategy and constrain long-term planning.

On the left side, Strategic-Level Misalignment illustrates the tension between stated commitments to resilience, localization, and sustainability and the dominance of donor-driven project cycles, rigid logframes, and output-focused reporting. Although strategic plans may emphasize transformational change, operational imperatives often prioritize short-term delivery, limiting progress toward long-term outcomes (Libert-Amico & Koloffon, 2025). On the right side, D'Orazio (2025), Governance-Level Misalignment captures how compliance-oriented accountability systems and risk-averse leadership incentives restrict strategic flexibility. Boards and senior management frequently prioritize financial and reputational risk mitigation, discouraging innovation, adaptive programming, and long-term investment in volatile contexts.

At the lower level, Operational Misalignment reflects the human and managerial consequences of short-termism. Reliance on short-term funding results in temporary contracts, high staff turnover, limited institutional memory, and constrained decision-making authority at the field level. These conditions weaken implementation capacity and disconnect operational practice from organizational mission (Mattera & Soto, 2023). Collectively, the interaction of these dimensions produces systemic misalignment, depicted at the base of the figure as eroded organizational coherence and reduced institutional resilience. The model underscores that strategic misalignment

in protracted humanitarian operations is not incidental but structurally embedded, reinforcing the need for comprehensive strategic realignment rather than isolated technical fixes.

Operational misalignment also manifests in human resource practices. Short-term funding translates into short-term contracts, limiting career progression and institutional memory. Field staff may be tasked with implementing long-term programs without the stability, authority, or resources required to do so effectively. Over time, such misalignment erodes organizational coherence and weakens the link between mission and practice (Mohamed et al., 2025). In protracted humanitarian operations, strategic misalignment thus becomes systemic rather than incidental. Understanding its multidimensional nature is essential for diagnosing its implications and identifying pathways toward realignment.

2.3 Implications for Funding Sustainability

Funding sustainability is one of the most significant casualties of strategic misalignment in protracted humanitarian operations. The prevailing humanitarian financing model remains heavily reliant on short-term, project-based funding, typically ranging from six to twelve months. While such funding is suitable for rapid emergency response, it is poorly aligned with the realities of long-term engagement (Nor & Moge, 2024). Strategic misalignment undermines funding sustainability in several ways. First, organizations are forced into a perpetual cycle of proposal writing and donor reporting, diverting managerial attention away from strategic planning and learning. Second, short-term funding discourages investment in organizational systems, staff development, and local partnerships, all of which are essential for long-term effectiveness. Third, donor fatigue becomes increasingly pronounced in protracted crises, particularly when measurable progress toward resolution appears limited (Toumaras, 2025).

Moreover, Alkhaldi et al. (2024), misalignment between donor priorities and community needs can erode legitimacy and trust. When funding incentives prioritize visibility and rapid outputs over sustainable outcomes, organizations may implement interventions that address symptoms rather than root causes. Over time, this dynamic weakens the case for continued donor investment, as humanitarian assistance is perceived as repetitive and ineffective. The lack of diversified funding streams further exacerbates vulnerability. Organizations heavily dependent on a narrow set of institutional donors face heightened financial risk when geopolitical priorities shift. Strategic misalignment thus contributes not only to funding volatility but also to long-term financial fragility (Brown et al., 2024).

2.4 Implications for Organizational Capacity

Organizational capacity encompasses the human, structural, and relational resources that enable an organization to fulfill its mission. In protracted humanitarian operations, strategic misalignment has profound implications for capacity at both individual and institutional levels (Delina et al., 2025). One of the most visible impacts is staff burnout and turnover. Humanitarian professionals operating in chronic crisis environments often face high workloads, emotional stress, and limited career progression due to the short-term nature of funding and contracts. Misalignment between organizational rhetoric on staff well-being and actual employment practices further exacerbates disengagement and attrition (Soyege et al., 2024).

At the institutional level, misalignment constrains learning and adaptation. Rigid funding and reporting frameworks limit opportunities for reflection, experimentation, and knowledge transfer across programs and contexts. As a result, organizations struggle to institutionalize lessons learned or develop context-specific strategies that evolve over time (Son et al., 2025). Additionally, Corbett et al. (2022), misalignment affects relationships with local actors. Despite widespread commitments to localization, many humanitarian organizations retain centralized decision-making

and control over resources. Short-term funding and compliance pressures discourage genuine power-sharing and capacity transfer, undermining the sustainability of local partnerships and perpetuating dependency. Collectively, these dynamics weaken organizational resilience, reducing the ability of humanitarian actors to respond effectively to changing conditions in protracted crises.

2.5 Toward Strategic Realignment in Protracted Humanitarian Contexts

Addressing strategic misalignment requires a fundamental shift in how humanitarian organizations conceptualize their role in protracted crises. Strategic realignment involves aligning mission, strategy, structure, funding, and partnerships around a coherent long-term vision (Narayanan & Altay, 2024). At the strategic level, organizations must move beyond binary distinctions between humanitarian and development action and adopt integrated approaches that prioritize resilience, systems strengthening, and local capacity. This requires revisiting organizational mandates and performance metrics to reflect long-term outcomes rather than short-term outputs (Qaddour et al., 2025).

In response to persistent strategic misalignment in protracted humanitarian operations, humanitarian organizations increasingly require a coherent framework that aligns long-term vision with operational practice. The figure presents a strategic realignment framework that illustrates the key pillars through which humanitarian actors can transition from short-term, emergency-oriented approaches toward sustainable, adaptive, and locally grounded engagement in prolonged crisis environments (Gureh & Ondara, 2024).



Figure 3: Toward Strategic Realignment in Protracted Humanitarian Contexts

The figure positions Strategic Realignment at the center, representing a long-term, integrated vision that aligns organizational mission, strategy, structure, funding, and partnerships. This central element underscores the necessity of moving beyond fragmented reforms toward a comprehensive transformation of humanitarian practice in protracted contexts (Plesner, 2025). Surrounding the central construct are four interdependent pillars that collectively enable strategic realignment. The first pillar, Strategic Shift, emphasizes the need to transcend rigid distinctions between humanitarian relief and development assistance. It highlights the integration of humanitarian and development approaches, prioritization of resilience and systems strengthening,

and adaptation of organizational mandates and performance metrics to reflect long-term outcomes rather than short-term outputs (Każmierczak et al., 2025). The second pillar, Sustainable Funding, addresses the financial foundations of long-term humanitarian engagement. It illustrates the importance of multi-year and flexible financing mechanisms, pooled funding arrangements, consortium-based implementation models, and engagement with non-traditional donors such as private foundations and social impact investors. These approaches enhance financial predictability and reduce dependence on annual emergency appeals (Akinbi & Oluwole, 2025). The third pillar, Organizational Capacity, focuses on internal institutional strengthening. It highlights deliberate investment in staff development, leadership continuity, knowledge management systems, and decentralized decision-making. Empowering field teams with greater strategic autonomy, while maintaining robust accountability structures, enhances adaptability and contextual responsiveness in volatile environments.

The fourth pillar, Meaningful Localization, captures the shift from rhetorical commitments to practical implementation of localization. This pillar emphasizes the transfer of resources, authority, and decision-making power to local actors, enabling them to lead long-term responses and adapt interventions to local realities. Meaningful localization is presented as both an ethical imperative and a strategic necessity for sustainable humanitarian impact (Kurniawan, 2025). Together, these four pillars converge toward coherent, long-term humanitarian approaches, illustrating how strategic realignment can address systemic misalignment and strengthen funding sustainability, organizational capacity, and overall effectiveness in protracted humanitarian contexts (Al Maalouf et al., 2025).

From a funding perspective, greater emphasis on multi-year, flexible financing is essential. Pooled funds, consortium-based approaches, and partnerships with non-traditional donors, including private foundations and social impact investors, can enhance financial stability and reduce dependency on annual appeals (Henriksen, 2024). Organizational capacity can be strengthened through deliberate investment in staff development, knowledge management, and decentralized decision-making. Empowering field teams with greater strategic autonomy, while maintaining strong accountability frameworks, can enhance adaptability and contextual responsiveness (Talisuna et al., 2025). Finally, meaningful localization must move beyond rhetoric to practice. Strategic realignment requires shifting power, resources, and decision-making authority to local actors, enabling them to lead long-term responses in their own contexts.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, desk-based research methodology that systematically builds on and synthesizes findings from previous empirical and conceptual studies. Such an approach is widely used in humanitarian and nonprofit research where access constraints, ethical considerations, and the long-term nature of crises make primary data collection challenging or insufficient for capturing structural and systemic dynamics (Bryman, 2016; Snyder, 2019). By relying on accumulated scholarly and institutional knowledge, the study aims to identify recurring patterns of strategic misalignment and examine their implications for funding sustainability and organizational capacity in protracted humanitarian operations.

3.1 Research Design

The research adopts an integrative literature review and conceptual synthesis design, which allows for the combination of theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and policy analyses into a coherent analytical framework (Singh, 2025). Unlike systematic reviews that focus narrowly on

effect sizes or intervention outcomes, integrative reviews are particularly suitable for theory development and problem conceptualization in complex social systems such as humanitarian action (Elmakki, 2025). This design enables the study to critically assess how strategic misalignment has been conceptualized, operationalized, and observed across prior studies, while also identifying gaps, contradictions, and converging insights. The approach aligns with established practices in organizational studies and humanitarian governance research, where cumulative understanding is generated through comparative and interpretive analysis rather than experimental designs (Shaheen et al., 2024).

3.2 Data Sources and Selection Criteria

The study draws on a broad range of secondary data sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, policy papers, evaluation reports, and strategic reviews produced by international humanitarian organizations and donor agencies. Key academic sources include journals focusing on humanitarian studies, nonprofit management, development studies, and organizational theory. Complementary grey literature was sourced from multilateral institutions and coordination bodies, which play a central role in shaping humanitarian strategy and financing frameworks (Thakur-Weigold et al., 2025; Shaheen et al., 2024). Source selection followed a purposive and relevance-based strategy commonly employed in qualitative secondary research (Gooding et al., 2022). Inclusion criteria required that sources explicitly address at least one of the following dimensions: (1) protracted humanitarian crises, (2) organizational strategy and alignment, (3) humanitarian financing mechanisms, or (4) organizational capacity and institutional resilience. Priority was given to studies examining long-term or recurrent humanitarian engagement, as these provide the most relevant insights into strategic misalignment over time.

3.3 Analytical Approach and Thematic Synthesis

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic synthesis approach, which involves systematic coding, categorization, and interpretation of qualitative findings across multiple studies (Geremedhn & Gebrihet, 2024). Relevant texts were reviewed iteratively to identify recurring concepts, explanatory mechanisms, and causal linkages related to strategic misalignment. Initial open coding captured descriptive themes such as short-term funding cycles, donor conditionality, emergency-oriented log frames, staff precarity, and localization constraints. These were subsequently grouped into higher-order analytical themes, including strategic–operational disjunction, funding rigidity, institutional learning deficits, and capacity erosion. The synthesis process enabled the integration of micro-level organizational observations with macro-level funding and governance structures, consistent with best practices in qualitative meta-synthesis (Bahna & Szalay, 2025).

3.4 Theoretical Lenses

To strengthen analytical depth, the study applies multiple theoretical lenses drawn from previous research. Organizational alignment theory is used to examine coherence between mission, strategy, structure, and environment (Patrucco et al., 2025). Resource dependence theory informs the analysis of funding sustainability, highlighting how reliance on external donors shapes organizational behavior and strategic choices (Ada & Abdullahi, 2022). Additionally, insights

from humanitarian governance literature are employed to contextualize misalignment within coordination systems, donor–agency power relations, and regulatory constraints (Tosi & Marty, 2024; Mazuryk & Shyroкова, 2024). The use of theoretical triangulation enhances interpretive validity by situating empirical patterns identified in prior studies within established conceptual frameworks (Libert-Amico & Koloffon, 2025).

4. Conclusion

Protracted humanitarian operations represent one of the most pressing challenges facing the global humanitarian system. As crises become longer and more complex, the persistence of strategic misalignment threatens the sustainability and effectiveness of humanitarian action. This article has argued that misalignment between organizational strategies, funding mechanisms, and operational realities undermines both funding sustainability and organizational capacity.

Without deliberate efforts toward strategic realignment, humanitarian organizations risk becoming trapped in cycles of short-termism, financial precarity, and institutional erosion. Conversely, aligning mission, strategy, funding, and capacity around the realities of protracted crises offers a pathway toward more sustainable, adaptive, and impactful humanitarian engagement. For humanitarian actors, donors, and policymakers alike, addressing strategic misalignment is not merely an organizational imperative but a moral and strategic necessity in an era of enduring human vulnerability.

5. Trustworthiness, Validity, and Limitations

The trustworthiness of the study is enhanced through source triangulation and analytical transparency. Drawing on multiple independent studies and institutional reports reduces the risk of single-source bias and increases the robustness of identified patterns (Yin, 2018). The consistent recurrence of themes across diverse contexts and organizations strengthens analytical validity. Nevertheless, limitations must be acknowledged. As a secondary-data-based study, the analysis is constrained by the quality, scope, and contextual specificity of existing research. The absence of primary field data limits insight into real-time decision-making processes and localized organizational dynamics. However, for the purpose of identifying systemic and structural patterns of strategic misalignment across protracted humanitarian operations, the chosen methodology remains appropriate and methodologically sound. Overall, this methodology provides a rigorous foundation for examining how strategic misalignment emerges, persists, and affects funding sustainability and organizational capacity in long-term humanitarian engagement.

6. Practical and Policy Recommendations

Based on the synthesized findings of previous studies and the analytical framework developed in this article, several strategic recommendations emerge for humanitarian organizations, donors, and policymakers operating in protracted crisis contexts. First, humanitarian organizations should undertake explicit strategic realignment exercises in protracted operations. This involves reassessing organizational mandates, theories of change, and performance indicators to ensure alignment with long-term engagement realities. Organizations should move beyond emergency-centric planning and adopt multi-year strategic frameworks that integrate humanitarian relief with resilience-building and systems-strengthening objectives (D'Orazio, 2025; Mattera & Soto, 2023).

Second, donors and funding institutions should expand the use of multi-year, flexible financing mechanisms. Evidence from prior studies consistently demonstrates that short-term, project-based funding exacerbates strategic misalignment and undermines institutional learning (Mohamed et al., 2025; Nor & Moge, 2024). Donors are encouraged to support adaptive programming, outcome-based reporting, and pooled funding arrangements that reduce administrative burden and enable long-term planning.

Third, humanitarian organizations should prioritize organizational capacity investment, particularly in staff development, leadership continuity, and knowledge management. Investing in national staff career pathways, psychosocial support, and learning systems is critical for sustaining operational effectiveness in chronic crisis environments (Toumaras, 2025). Such investments should be treated as strategic necessities rather than overhead costs. Finally, commitments to localization must be operationalized through genuine power-sharing and resource transfer. This includes delegating decision-making authority to local partners, increasing direct funding to national organizations, and redesigning accountability systems to support mutual trust rather than compliance-driven control (Alkhaldi et al., 2024; Brown et al., 2024).

7. Theoretical and Managerial Implications

This study offers several important theoretical and managerial implications. From a theoretical perspective, the article extends organizational alignment theory by applying it to the humanitarian domain, demonstrating how misalignment becomes institutionalized under conditions of prolonged uncertainty and resource dependence. By integrating organizational alignment theory with resource dependence theory and humanitarian governance frameworks, the study provides a more holistic explanation of why misalignment persists in protracted humanitarian operations.

The findings also contribute to humanitarian studies by reframing funding sustainability and organizational capacity not as operational challenges, but as strategic outcomes shaped by institutional design and governance structures. This perspective challenges dominant narratives that attribute humanitarian underperformance primarily to contextual volatility or security constraints. From a managerial standpoint, the article highlights the need for humanitarian leaders to adopt adaptive and systems-oriented leadership approaches. Managers operating in protracted crises must balance compliance with donors while simultaneously fostering innovation, learning, and staff well-being. Strategic leadership in such contexts requires navigating competing institutional logics and aligning internal systems with external realities. For policymakers, the study underscores the importance of aligning humanitarian policy frameworks with the temporal realities of modern crises. Without policy reforms that enable longer-term planning, flexible financing, and localization, strategic misalignment will continue to undermine the effectiveness and sustainability of humanitarian action.

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