

A Climate of Cooperation or Competition? UNHCR, IOM and Disaster Displacement

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and International Organization for Migration (IOM) have expanded their original mandates to address the impact of disasters and environmental change on human mobility. Until now, a lack of in-depth empirical research at the individual level has been undertaken in this area. This paper documents the use of Q method to interview 15 current and former agency staff and experts on UNHCR and IOM and identify their shared perspectives on agency involvement and cooperation. We identify both friction and commonalities between UNHCR and IOM and find that the emergence of climate change as a policy issue in the last 15 years has provided an opportunity for divergence from historical mandates and the creation of new norms, interests and interaction. Understanding individual perspectives boosts the potential for UNHCR and IOM to fill governance gaps in environmental and disaster displacement and strengthen international response to climate displacement more broadly.

Introduction

Climate change is a collective action problem requiring collective responses and solutions, therefore, it poses both great challenges, and opportunities to International Organizations (IOs). In the 21st century, IOs have contended with budgetary cutbacks and increasingly protectionist policies at the national level. At the same time, there has been a proliferation of IOs and other relevant actors engaging with climate change in a variety of intersecting issue areas, including migration, health, livelihoods, and human rights. IOs now find themselves part of a rapidly evolving humanitarian marketplace - competing for leadership and funding, while internally tackling the challenges climate change poses for not only historically inherited mandates and roles, but also relationships with constituents, states, and partner IOs. Cooperation is therefore a major challenge, not only externally, but internally between individuals who ultimately carry out the work of IOs. Any significant inter – or intra – IO issues may limit the impact of present and future agency work in emerging issue areas such as environmental displacement and in other climate – society interactions. It is therefore important to better understand how individual perspectives inform cooperation and competition at IOs on emerging and rapidly developing issue areas.

This paper focuses on individual perspectives from and surrounding two highly interrelated organizations on the issue area of environmental and disaster displacement – the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and International Organization for Migration (IOM). The UNHCR and IOM are the two most prominent international organizations engaged in this issue area, as well as in issues related to migration in the broader sense (Cohen & Bradley, 2010, p. 118; Crisp, 2009; Goodwin-Gill & McAdam, 2017, pp. 5–9; Hall, 2013, p. 91). Both have become involved in various climate adaptation projects, and in recent years have expanded their reach to respond in cases of internal displacement, including

cases following natural hazards. Both agencies have regularly projected themselves as competent and willing disaster responders in self-published texts, as well as collaborators – particularly via the Inter-Agency Standing Committee’s (IASC) Cluster Approach for humanitarian response. Further, the relationship between the two agencies in this area merits attention – not least because their histories are heavily intertwined, but because inter-agency cooperation has been recognized as critical to addressing global issues such as environmental displacement and related climate change (Cohen & Bradley, 2010, p. 139).

It has been theorised that inherent tensions in relationships between international organizations and states are structural; namely, the result of complex historical processes (Pécoud, 2018, p. 1624) and the overlapping of mandates and concerns (Elie, 2010, p. 346). On the other hand, actors within these agencies also possess agency. While international civil servants are required to work within the aims and scopes of their organisation, staff actions and interactions are partly conditioned by individual beliefs, attitudes and perspectives on states, displaced persons and interventions (Barnett & Finnemore, 1999, p. 706; Freitas, 2004, p. 126). Until now, little attention has been given to internal and surrounding individual perspectives on agency involvement in environmental and disaster displacement. To understand a public projection is one matter; to understand agency staff and colleagues’ perspectives quite another. It is only when we directly consider the voices of those making day-to-day decisions at both the policy and operational level, that we may consider the implications of such perspectives for future organizational involvement in critical emerging issue areas such as environmental and disaster displacement. This paper addresses the question: *How do staff and (non-aligned) experts view the position of UNHCR and IOM in relation to environmental/disaster displacement and each other?*

To address this question we use Q method, a research tool designed to reveal subjective perspectives in any given situation (Brown, 1980). This paper therefore aims to enrich understandings of shared views and commonalities across and between agencies, uncover underlying cooperation issues, and raise questions for future research. This paper first introduces the argument for research on (cooperative and competitive) involvement at, and between, the UNHCR and IOM on the issue area of environmental and disaster displacement in the 21st century context. We provide a brief explanation for taking a historical institutionalist and behavioural logics approach to this topic, thereby justifying our consideration of individual perspectives versus more traditional units of analysis in the study of IOs and the international system. A general overview of Q method and description of how Q was applied throughout the study is then provided, including how statements and participants were selected, interviews were carried out, and data analysed. Results are presented by way of distinctive perspectives or viewpoints identified from the data on the issue area of environmental and disaster displacement, followed by a discussion of findings. We find clear divisions in perspectives of how displacement should be managed. Lastly, conclusions are drawn, including an assessment of what individual perspectives can tell us about cooperation and competition at IOs on emerging and rapidly developing issue areas, and the importance of further connections between theory and empirics in this area within international relations.

Assessing Cooperation and Competition at the UNHCR and IOM

In the specific issue area of environmental migration and displacement, UNHCR and the IOM are historical heavyweights at the IO level, in partnership since their post-World War II creation. The UNHCR was designed as a legal body with limited jurisdiction over refugee law,

and the IOM as an operational, non-UN counterpart, tasked with the physical movement of Europe’s migrant population, including refugees. Since their inception, UNHCR and IOM have expanded both their operational reach and the scope of their work, including their mandates. Both agencies now have over 10,000 staff members, heavily concentrated in field offices around the globe, and budgets exceeding US \$1 billion, which are used in a wide-ranging sphere of activities that often overlap (International Organization for Migration, 2018, 2019b; UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 2019). In 2016, the IOM was granted the status of ‘related organization’ by the UN, and has dubbed itself the ‘UN Migration Agency,’ rendering differences between the two more opaque than ever before (International Organization for Migration, 2019a).

This shared history, combined with an increasing blurring in tasks, has led to a relationship defined by a mixture of complementarity, cooperation and competition. On more recent issues of environmental and disaster displacement, the two agencies have specialised their involvement to carry out adaptation projects and support systems. Notable examples include their complementary co-lead roles of the Protection (UNHCR) and Camp Coordination and Camp Management (IOM) clusters in the Inter Agency Standing Committee’s (IASC) humanitarian Cluster Approach (UN OCHA, 2018) and cooperation in the Nansen Initiative and its successor, the Platform on Disaster Displacement, the Global Migration Group (McAdam, 2016) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Task Force on Displacement (UNFCCC, 2015).

On the other hand, the relationship between the two has often been defined as one of competition, particularly when it comes to funding, with both relying on donors (primarily visible as member states) to bankroll activities (Elie, 2010, p. 353; Pécoud, 2018, p. 1629). Primary differences in agency structure have also been identified as competition inducing, as the IOM’s broader definition of who they help (and lack of legal obligations) has contributed to an expansion into issue areas that have in the past been the mainstay of the UNHCR; IOM now works in protection-related activities and ‘forced’ migration, which has included those forcibly displaced by natural disasters. For Cohen and Bradley (2010, pp. 119–139), a lack of consensus in this area over a division of labour on UNHCR and IOM’s part is of major concern for affected persons; these agencies should be better complementing and reinforcing each other’s work. For Koch (2014, p. 916), how each agency defines their work is a root issue, yet also a fact to be exploited. For example, IOM is frequently involved in ‘voluntary’ migration activities as requested by states which would be considered ‘forced’ by others. It may make sense for UNHCR to encourage IOM’s work in these areas, as it prevents UNHCR engaging ‘in activities that would blemish its humanitarian identity and therefore undermine its moral authority’ (Koch, 2014, p. 917).

Several theories have the potential to explain the UNHCR and IOM’s involvement in disaster and environmental displacement, particularly that of *path dependence* from historical institutionalism, the related *policy inheritance* from more behavioural explanations, and *logics of behavior*, which offer a broad explanation for why and where UNHCR and IOM differ in their engagement. According to Skocpol and Pierson (2002), path dependence is a self-reinforcing or positive feedback process, where agencies become involved in new issue areas according to what ‘worked’ before. Path dependency is associated with the concept of ‘policy inheritances’ from more empirical organizational decision-making models, such as that of Jones and Baumgartner (2007, p. 49), whereby ‘policies today are not made in a vacuum; they are built on previous policy decisions, which exert a heavy hand on future commitments.’

Such concepts allow for the idea that organizational change can originate from within as well as outside of an organization. This is critical in the consideration of the expansion of scope in the area of forced migration to include ‘IDPs and migrants in crises as key categories of concern alongside refugees’ – a backdrop against which IOM and UNHCR alike have expanded their reach (Bradley, 2017, p. 99).

Differences in the involvement of UNHCR and IOM in new issue areas such as environmental and disaster displacement can also be explained by behavioural logic based on IO type (Habermas, 1996; March & Olsen, 1998, 2008). Nina Hall has developed a typology based on the notion that International Governmental Organizations (IGOs) exist on a spectrum from functional to normative, in which the UNHCR is classed as normative and the IOM as functional (Hall, 2013). Given the UNHCR’s supervisory authority over refugee law and lack of moral authority over issues beyond the refugee regime, it seeks assurance its activities are carried out on themes over which it has legitimacy. In doing so, the UNHCR follows ‘logic of appropriateness’ – reflected in its staff’s dedication to their mandate and strong commitment to refugee protection before all else (Betts et al., 2012; Hall, 2013, p. 96; Koch, 2014, p. 914). In contrast, as a functional agency, the IOM is a project-based organization, ‘existing to perform specific tasks that demonstrate efficiency to donors,’ with the potential to expand into new issue areas according to donor needs (Hall, 2013, p. 93).

Whilst their histories have been largely interlinked, and the inter-agency relationship always defined by both competition and collaboration, engagement in recent decades with the new issue area of environmental and disaster displacement has provided an opportunity for realignment and potentially increased complexities in the relationship. Although UNHCR has been termed a ‘late starter’ when it comes to environmental displacement (Elie, 2010, p. 349; Zieck, 2006), the creation of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement in the 1990’s included the protection of those displaced by disasters, thereby expanding the morally obligated scope of UNHCR. The agency’s work in this area is particularly visible from the mid-2000’s onwards. Alternatively, IOM’s theoretically non-normative, functional position allowed for earlier expansion and engagement (Hall, 2013, p. 97). Observing and acting on this divide, member states have been able to capitalize on the strengths and weaknesses of both agencies as they expand into new issue areas. For example, IOM’s flexibility and lack of formal mandate, has made it an appealing agent through which states can implement programs (Bradley, 2017, p. 99). This has raised tensions in relation to protection and human rights matters, which are increasingly understood as a core aspect of disaster displacement and humanitarian crisis management and have long been the mainstay of UNHCR’s work (Pécoud, 2018; United Nations, 2013).

The Case for Focusing on Individual Perspectives

The theories outlined thus far explain the role agencies play in disaster displacement through material and non-material structures developed through history and mandates. However, we argue that *agency* of and within these agencies matters, and that ‘there is no way to cope with the issue of agency and institutions without ultimately confronting how individuals relate to and work within organizations’ (Abdelnour et al., 2017, p. 1176). Within IR, much of what might be considered theories about agency has been mired in complex ‘agency-structure’ debates over whether structures shape agent behaviour, or whether agents are able to ‘step out’ and transform structures themselves (Knafo, 2010, p. 499). Beyond this generalization, principle-agent theories tend to either assume functionalist behaviour on behalf of IOs and

examine them as whole agents (usually a State or whole organization) with limited agential breakdown (Hawkins et al., 2006) or keep discussions at the abstract theoretical level (Dessler, 1989). While Johnson and Urpelainen (2014) argue for the use of theories on bureaucracy and principal-agent relationships in order to highlight tensions regarding the delegation of tasks between actors, their focus on the State-IGO level results in a failure to fully consider whether or not the study of individuals may be worthwhile. Nonetheless, their argument that a traditional focus on states in international relations stands at odds with the reality of IGO creation – ‘approximately two-thirds of the IGOs that exist today were created with involvement by international bureaucrats employed in pre-existing IGOs’ – is promising for the future consideration of individual perspectives (Johnson and Urpelainen, 2014, p. 178).

On that note, it is worth acknowledging that IR scholars have considered the agency of individuals within IOs in constructivist discussions on norm dynamics, whereby the roles and abilities of individuals or certain groups are able to influence the position and responses of institutions, and even shape norms and values (Barnett & Finnemore, 1999; Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). Taking such discussions into account, Karlsrud (2014, p. 87) has considered the consequences of frequently rotating United Nations (UN) peacekeeping staff between practice and policy, the ensuing inter-staff dynamics, and the implications these shifting dynamics may have for ‘the development of doctrines and evolving practices within the UN.’ Such studies undoubtedly recognize the importance of the individual level in the study of IOs. As in Karlsrud’s UN peacekeeping example, environmental and disaster displacement is an issue area with a revolving door for individuals, making the study of individuals within it even more pertinent. A similar point was recently made for the disaster displacement community; ‘there are very few areas of policy-making where researchers and policy-makers interact so regularly, attending the same conferences, sitting in the same committees and developing common work together’ (Gemenne & Rosenow-Williams, 2016, p. 238).

We support Karlsrud’s (2014) argument that a more complex understanding of agency and actors is needed to understand the involvement of IOs - particularly in complex, emerging issue areas such as environmental and disaster displacement - as it is only in accounting for a wide range of actors that we may begin to understand ‘instances of practical innovation to achieve change and bend existing rules’ (Karlsrud, 2014, p. 95). We go one step further to consider not only (perceived) ‘powerful individuals,’ but a range of individuals across relevant IOs and other institutions (Karlsrud, 2014, p. 95). Recent work from Cornut (2018) is also indicative of a change in emphasis in the consideration of individuals and practitioners from abstract theoretical musings to direct application. However, whilst Cornut (2018, p. 712) argues that practitioners may not follow traditionally conceptualized IR understandings of behaviour (individuals as rational, norm compliant, habitual actors following path dependent processes, for example), we choose not to overlook existing conceptions in IR. Rather we argue that these have suffered from a lack of integration and application to studies of individuals. In sum, while the importance of subjectivity in the study of cooperation within international relations has been recognised for two decades (Bieler & Morton, 2001), in the intervening period empirical research is lacking. Attempting to understand the range of subjective perspectives and opinions from UNHCR, IOM and surrounding experts has the potential to provide a more nuanced picture of agency involvement in, and collaboration on, environmental and disaster displacement. Whilst previous work has touched upon the importance of interviews as empirical sources ‘for studying the motivations and concerns’ of staff in the broader field of migration (Koch, 2014, p. 910), a clear gap exists on the topic of

environmental and disaster displacement (Hall, 2013; Pécoud, 2018, p. 1623). It is this gap we seek to address through a study of subjective perceptions of agency staff, generating unique, individual level empirical data on IGOs in the field of environmental and disaster displacement with implications for the role of individual agency in IGO interaction. It must be recognized that this is a small case study, and thus limited in terms of generalizability, however we believe this study is a step in the right direction.

Methods

About Q

The investigation of subjectivity is not responsive to traditional research methods (Converse, 2006). Actors do not make decisions based entirely on conscious and rational thought (Douglas, 1986), therefore survey style quantitative methods typically provide superficial information about the way in which people think, or conceptualise phenomena (Mrtek et al., 1996), while conventional qualitative interviews may not produce robust data. The use of Q reduces such biases, given it obliges individuals to display preferences in relation to other choices and can even enable the researcher to access knowledge below the level of full consciousness (Brown, 1980). For these reasons, this study adopts Q method to produce deep and robust data on subjective perspectives.

Q method was devised in the middle of the 20th century in the field of social psychology as a way of investigating people’s subjective opinion on a particular issue (Stephenson, 1953; Brown, 1980)), producing a meta-consensus (Niemeyer & Dryzek, 2007). It has been used to unveil participants’ tastes, values, beliefs and attitudes (Baker, 2006). It is a mixed method as it combines the rigour of quantitative factor analysis (Eden et al., 2005) with qualitative style interviews (Ockwell, 2008). Q studies can be conducted in person or online, with no implications for reliability (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Relevant Q literature

Researchers have started to use Q method to investigate migration, displacement healthcare and (international) organizations over the last decade. For example, studies have used Q to understand expert perceptions on environment and migration (Morinière & Hamza, 2012) and integration of Muslims into Australian society and secularism (Dryzek & Kanra, 2014). There have also been studies which attempt to gain an understanding of affected peoples’ perceptions of environment-related mobility. Recent studies have revealed the subjective understandings of climate and migration in Kiribati, Tuvalu and Nauru (Oakes, 2019) and Marshall Islands (van der Geest et al., 2019). Research has been conducted on healthcare in terms of healthcare priorities of Syrian refugees in Jordan according to refugees and providers (Al-Rousan et al., 2018) and sexual and reproductive health care for refugees and migrants in Australia (Mengesha et al., 2018). In Nepal, a study examined how responders and recipients of aid viewed each other and the crisis (Hilhorst et al., 2012). Researchers have used Q to study organisational values on a range of topics, both closely related to, and further removed from, the study of international organizations, including in relation to climate adaptation (Uittenbroek et al., 2014), and [social responsibility](#) and global civic engagement (Sklarwitz, 2017). Further, Q has also been used to understand bureaucratic norms, beliefs and values in Europe (O’Connor, 2013), compare German and US perspectives on reform of the UN Security Council (Schwenk, 2019) and the effectiveness of United Nations environmental regimes (Frantzi et al., 2009).

While many IR scholars may question the value of small scale and individual studies, we believe that 21st century issues such as climate change and intersecting issue areas such as migration and displacement require consideration from a variety of angles if we are to arrive at tangible solutions or understandings. Until now, to the authors’ knowledge there has not been a published Q study which considers how agencies interact in the context of displacement.

How the study was undertaken

Statements

A broad range of information, opinions and positions on IOM and UNHCR in relation to disaster and environmental displacement was considered. Documents and publications consulted consisted of publications from UNHCR and IOM, as well as from other intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and academia. Over 100 verbatim statements were collected representing key, recurring points of view on IOM and UNHCR and their role in relation to disaster and environmental displacement, which were then narrowed down to a more manageable set of 36 statements which still fairly reflected the broader sample (Barry & Proops, 1999). To sample the statements, they were divided into 12 thematic areas (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Each theme was created with empirical and theoretical considerations (Table 1). The empirical factors included were mandates, the role of states, inter-agency cooperation and the specific context of climate change. Theoretical aspects were historical institutionalism, norms and functional positioning. Three statements per theme were selected, with the aim of covering each theme from a range of perspectives. In this way, the participants were asked to give their opinion on structural factors, thereby operationalizing their subjectivity and expressing their agency.

Table 1: The theoretical and empirical sampling of the statements

		Theoretical factors		
		History	Norms	Functions
Empirical factors	Mandates			
	States			
	Cooperation			
	Climate			

Note: three statements were selected in each of the twelve squares. For example, three statements concerned how historical factors relate to mandates.

Once statements were selected, the first author carried out a pilot study with one to four participants with expertise on both environmental and disaster displacement and international organizations from within academia and the environmental and disaster displacement field.

Through this process, several new statements were produced to fill identified gaps in coverage and edits were made to existing statements, including clarifications and to ensure a balance of affirmations and negations (see Appendix).

Participants

Several individuals and profiles were identified as potential interviewees from preliminary research and analysis. These included current or former UNHCR and IOM staff that were either involved, or working on the topic(s) of disaster and environmental displacement, as well as those people from related and other organizations who had a deep knowledge of the work of UNHCR and IOM in the issue area. Initially contacts were established with personnel who had authored or were mentioned in agency publications studied, as well as through contacts made during the first author's research stay at the United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) in Bonn, Germany, in early 2019. A snowball methodology was used, and interviews were carried out with agency staff from a variety of departments, in field and head offices. The final sample consisted of fifteen participants, five for each group of UNHCR, IOM, and 'other experts.' Care was taken to ensure each group covered a range of demographics across gender, relative age, level of experience, and whether participants were based at headquarters or in country/field offices (Table 2).

Table 2: Q Study participants demographics

Agency	Male/Female	Field/HQ	Junior/Mid-Level/Senior
IOM1	F	Field	Mid-Level
IOM2	M	HQ	Senior
IOM3	F	HQ	Senior
IOM4	M	Field	Mid-Level
IOM5	F	Field	Junior
UNHCR1	M	HQ	Senior
UNHCR2	F	HQ	Senior
UNHCR3	F	HQ	Senior
UNHCR4	F	Field	Junior
UNHCR5	F	HQ	Mid-Level
OTHER1	M	HQ	Senior
OTHER2	M	HQ	Senior
OTHER3	F	Field	Mid-Level
OTHER4	F	HQ	Senior
OTHER5	F	HQ	Junior

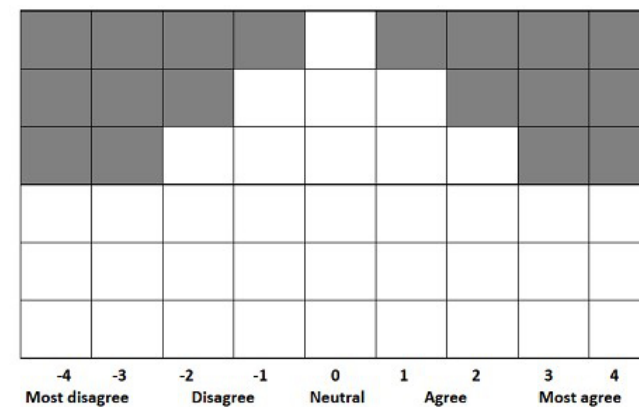
The lead author undertook all interviews. Face-to-face interviews were conducted at IOM and UNHCR headquarters, as well as on the margins of the 2019 UNISDR Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in Geneva. Although face-to-face interviews were generally preferred by the research team, some participants preferred to use teleconferencing, reflecting the idea that many who would otherwise say no to a face-to-face interview are often willing to participate if teleconferencing is offered (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014).

Conducting the Q Sort and Sort Instructions

Seven participants carried out the Q sort activity in-person during their interview under the instruction of the researcher. This process required arranging the statements, which were printed and laminated, on a large chart. The chart allowed for statement allocation across a spectrum ranging from -4 (strongly disagree) to +4 (strongly agree) on a bell-shaped grid (fig 1). Participants were encouraged to first place statements into three piles according to whether they agreed, disagreed or were unsure before placing statements on the chart, and to think aloud while sorting. Once completed, the researcher probed the participant for comments on the placing of statements in the extremes of the chart, as well as for any general comments or thoughts the participant had. Comments were recorded to provide additional context, and the researcher photographed the final Q sort from each participant for later analysis.

The remaining eight participants completed a Q sort online using Lloyd's Q Sort Tool¹. This software was chosen as the activity layout was almost identical to the process used with in-person participants; users dragged and dropped statements with the option of first dividing them into three piles for agree, disagree and unsure, and space was given at the end of the process for comments on extreme statements as well as more generally.

Figure 1: The statement grid



Analysis (Ken-Q)

The authors used the freeware programme KenQ Analysisⁱⁱ for data analysis. The individual sorts (rankings) for each statement were entered into the programme, with Principle Component Analysis (PCA) used to both simplify and reveal patterns in the data. Varimax

rotation was applied to automatically minimize statistical variation in the data. Through this process, participants were loaded across three perspectives with an eigenvalue of 1.43 or higher (considered a high loading according to the accepted formula of $2.58/\sqrt{n}$) (Webler et al., 2007).

Participants were selected if they loaded on one, and only one, perspective. Significant scores were then flagged, which led to five individuals associated with both the first and second perspective, and two individuals associated with the third. Three of the participants did not load significantly on any given perspective, however their viewpoints were still of interest and are discussed in the results section. Narratives for each shared perspective were derived and written up from an analysis of both the related interview data/comments collected, and the factor analysis results from Ken-Q.

Results

Shared Perspective 1 (4 IOM and 1 other): Expansionists

Summary

This perspective can be summarised as one convinced of the ability of the studied agencies to address the issue area of disaster displacement and environmental migration more generally, so long as this is where donor-interests lie. Participants with this perspective feel they are not only more flexible to address this area given their lack of legal mandate, but that mandates should be questioned in disaster contexts. Given their focus on flexibility and willingness to work in new issue areas, this group can be termed ‘expansionists.’

Profile

Four IOM employees/former employees and one non-aligned expert loaded very strongly on the first shared perspective, seemingly indicating an ‘IOM perspective.’ Two employees had primarily field-based experience with IOM, whilst the other two occupied senior, headquarters and desk-based positions concerned with policy making. The non-aligned expert was a lower-level employee working within the parameters of headquarters-based policy work.

Shared Perspective Narrative

Participants in this group see that agencies are agreed on the importance of climate change and mobility. One participant noted that *“climate change and mobility are where we need to be properly engaged”* and *“we can’t not address it”* (3). They believe that agencies have the ability to influence states (14), and that states do not obstruct agency work (10). This is perhaps due to this group’s belief in flexibility – following rules is not always the best approach to an issue – so long as they are still able to meet the needs of donors (4, 16). While this group feels donors are willing to expand agency budgets and responsibilities (13), this could be because states are focused on protecting their populations (18), and an agency willing to help with member state needs is an agency worth funding. Simultaneously, the current donor system is not enough to address this issue area, hence why additional partnerships are necessary to move forward (6, 23).

Concerns about flexibility and meeting donor needs extend to mandates, with this group feeling IOM is broader and more flexible in this aspect than UNHCR – *‘we have a much wider spectrum of activity,’* highlighted one participant (7). Further, this group thinks agencies should be able to work outside of their traditional mandates, and not differentiate tasks along hard lines of responsibility (19). Rigidity is also unhelpful when it comes to emergencies, but

a human rights approach is still necessary, with *“stronger legal interventions...essential to build consensus required for on the ground protection”* (8).

As with all shared perspectives, participants here believe that *“no one would ever even entertain the idea”* of setting up a new UN agency (36) to work in this area, perhaps as they have faith in the cluster approach (27). IOM and UNHCR’s working relationship are situational: *“there’s some contexts in which the two organisations work together amazingly well, and there’s others where they don’t.”*

Shared Perspective 2 (4 UNHCR and 1 Other): Normativists

Summary

This group believes strongly in the cooperative power of the UN and associated agencies to address this issue area, so long as protection mechanisms are still enforced and hopefully strengthened. No one agency has an advantage to lead in disaster displacement and on environmental migration, although creating a division of labour makes sense. Given their practical confidence in existing systems and mandates, this group can be termed ‘normativists.’

Profile

Four UNHCR employees and one expert who previously worked for UNHCR loaded very strongly on this perspective, indicating a ‘UNHCR perspective.’ All but one UNHCR employee were headquarters-based in their work (primarily on policy-related work), although most had spent a considerable proportion of their career in developing countries and in war zones. Four participants loading on this perspective were in senior roles.

Shared Perspective Narrative

People loading on this perspective believe their agency agrees on the importance of the issue (2,3) but that it does not have the ability to bring about significant change alone. On the other hand, they think UN agencies working together *can*, reflecting a general confidence in the UN system (20). They strongly identify with the notion that the UN human rights framework forms the basis of their work and believe firmly in the principles of mandate (8,1). Their confidence in current structures means there is no need to create a new UN entity to deal with the issue (36) and the cluster approach works (35), although there is room for improvement (30) – a possibility, given this group’s belief in the ability of agencies to influence states (14).

Like the Expansionists, this group believes the current donation-based system to fund disaster displacement is insufficient (6): *“we only get half of the funding we need.”* Relatedly, they see difficulties in balancing their historically mandated work while also addressing funders’ (primarily member states) priorities (16). As a result, it makes sense for this group to divide the workload in this issue area. With a mandate to protect refugees, this group can easily justify aiding forced migrants and leaving voluntary migration to the IOM, for numerous reasons (19). On the one hand, *‘for the people concerned, it would be so much better if we wouldn’t be jockeying for positions, but if we would actually do whatever the advantage of each agency is,’* and on the other, with such an approach, the UNHCR could *‘remain principled,’* according to one participant. Another agreed that *‘a clarity of roles is needed for better complementarity’* (19).

Normativists view the UNHCR-IOM working relationship more favourably than the Expansionist group. Participants here do not have a negative opinion on cooperative

relationships (25), nor do they think that mandates generate competition. This may be because stark differences between UNHCR's legally binding mandate and the IOM's mandate eliminates any competition. Instead, where tension occurs, *'it's not the mandates, it's the people who are the problem,'* according to one participant. Another concurs that any issues are *'probably more to do with individuals'* (21). In line with this thinking, this group does not agree that IOM has a broader mandate than UNHCR (7), however they recognise the IOM's strengths regarding disaster response particularly - according to one participant, their *'relationship with the governments and disaster agencies and...capacity building.'*

Shared Perspective 3 (1 IOM, 1 other): Neorealists

Summary

This group has faith in the ability of the UNHCR and IOM to address disaster displacement and environmental migration more generally but are cynical as to what extent this is possible. This attitude stems from a belief that states control agency action and agencies are more in competition than not; although this would not necessarily be the case were both agencies quicker to adapt to addressing real-world challenges today. Given their focus on power balances and structural constraints, this group can be termed 'neorealists.'

Profile

One former entry-level IOM employee and another senior manager within the UN system, who both had extensive knowledge and experience working with both agencies and in the issue area load very highly on this factor. Both were female and differed in seniority.

Shared Perspective Narrative

These two people believe that power balances between member States condition agency responses because *"States are very concerned with their sovereignty – they want to know that ultimately they can do what they want to do"* (17). Assistance to States should be expanded and unconditional (15). However, despite States' control over agency funding, agencies do have a marginal ability to affect State behaviour (3,14). This is perhaps especially important, considering States need to be reminded to protect their populations before and after disasters (18). Additionally, there needs to be a shift away from the rights and duties of States (11) towards the rights of people. Agencies can bring about change as *"agencies do have a direct effect on state behaviour"* (33), but it is important to remain principled (4). Funding is seen as insufficient (6) within the humanitarian marketplace (22).

Those aligning with this factor believe there is no need for a new UN organisation, but stronger legal measures would translate into better protection (36,30). IOM and UNHCR should work according to their traditional mandates, which are blurred in the context of environmental change and lead to competition (19,21,29). As one participant stated, synergies are under-exploited because *"neither organization has really moved on yet to adapt to changes in the system and in our world."* This group has a rather cynical and contradictory perspective on both agencies' roles in, and ability to work on, this issue area. They do not find a strong link between environmental displacement and the UNHCR and IOM's goals, and are of the mind that if funding for this area were adequate, they would not necessarily expand further in this direction (3,5). Additionally, these agencies are divided on how much to engage in the issue area in the first place at all (32). However, as above, there is potential for these agencies to affect positive change (2).

Confounded Sorts

One UNHCR employee and two other non-aligned expert interviewees (HCR3, Other2 and Other3) did not load highly on only one factor and therefore they are excluded from the analysis of the factors above. Nonetheless, their complicated perspectives deserve some attention.

UNHCR3's responses are of interest, as while not loading highly with the normativists, many of her interview comments were fundamentally mandate driven. For example, while this participant conceded that IOM was more flexible *precisely because* they do not have a legal mandate, *'my personal belief is if we didn't have that legal framework, our work would be much more difficult, especially in the current political context'* (7). However, she strongly agreed that rigidly adhering to principles was at times inappropriate in emergency scenarios, indicating the division of labour should be framed rather as *'help where you can and where you can bring added value'* (4). This participant also had much to say about the Cluster Approach – while she agreed the Cluster System was in a dysfunctional state, finding it *'very headquarters and very capital focused'* (35), she disagreed that it had not been fully exploited (26). This participant's perspectives on disaster management and belief in the need for strong protection mechanisms are perhaps explained by her combined experiences at both headquarters and in the field, including in disaster-affected areas and war zones.

Other2's position in another UN agency provided a unique perspective on the topic. He felt that IOM and UNHCR's mandates generate tension and competition and reasoned that it was due to *'different constitutional and funding structures, which create antagonistic and competition-based approaches'* (21). While not disputing the importance of States in the work of both agencies, this participant believed that *'these tensions are actively exploited by States for their own purposes.'* Similarly, Other2 strongly disagrees that a new UN entity should be created to lead on this issue and aligns with the first perspective in his disagreement that UNHCR should work in forced migration and the IOM in voluntary migration. As he explained:

Migration is a multi-faceted phenomenon and requires a whole-of-UN-system, whole-of-government, and whole-of-society response. Reducing this to a conversation of whether IOM or UNHCR (or a new entity) should be in the lead is the surest way not to respond to the rights and protection gaps that currently exist and can be addressed if we stop with the incessant mandate competition (36, 19).

Other3 warrants consideration because of her unusual loading between the second and third perspectives (in the mid-range), which could be reflective of her split background between headquarters and field positions. She had very strong feelings on certain issues, stating that *'IOM and HCRs mandates generate tension and competition due to an absence of clearly defined roles in grey areas of mixed migration, and circumstances where multiple drivers overlap'* (21). She also strongly felt that *'climate change and disaster displacement is perhaps the most critical protection concern of the century,'* firmly believing the UNHCR *'must engage to stay relevant and moreover to protect those most vulnerable on our planet'* (31).

Discussion

That the majority of those interviewed from IOM and UNHCR grouped onto the first (IOM) and second (UNHCR) perspectives could be interpreted as indicative of "agency perspectives." From the empirical data, we can compare these two positions with earlier

theoretical explanations for engagement. The ‘IOM’ perspective is abstractly reflective of claims made in the broader literature regarding its ‘expansionist’ position, whilst those loading on the ‘UNHCR’ perspective have a comparatively higher confidence in mandates and the UN system. This indicates a general alignment with the concept of normative and functional IGO types.

However, through the utilisation of Q method, we can interpret further. The two agency centric perspectives, whilst indicating division in agency outlook, also share several commonalities. Both factors agree that displacement related to disasters is less politically controversial than other work they do. They both feel further work in this area is warranted; although without changes to current funding mechanisms, significant expansion may be unlikely. Both perspectives feel pressure to balance carrying out their historically associated tasks, indicating a certain level of path dependence and policy inheritances, with serving donor needs. However, these needs may be changing quicker than the agencies themselves, as touched upon by one non-aligned expert. Lifelong ties to the UN system mean both agencies feel the UN Human Rights framework informs their work to varying extents, although the UNHCR is more likely to have confidence in the UN system. Close ties to the UN are understood as a double-edged sword for both perspectives. On the one hand, Member States may affect institutional change (for better or worse), but staff also feel UNHCR, and IOM can affect state behaviour. There is clearly confidence that both agencies are central actors in the field of environmental displacement and should be part of future responses, with staff feeling their agencies are at least internally cohesive on how to address disaster displacement. Further collaboration between agencies should strengthen effective, albeit not fully exploited, frameworks such as the UN Cluster Approach. Staff across both agencies agree that stronger legal measures are required but are staunchly against the creation of a UN entity for this topic. Instead, new partnerships across sectors are a necessary step for progress.

While these agencies share many of the same values and concerns, strong disagreement across factors is seen regarding the role of the UNHCR and IOM in relation to one another. This indicates that contention between UNHCR and IOM has more to do with cross-agency relations and subsequent understanding of roles as opposed to the issue area of environmental and disaster displacement itself. There may be several explanations for these differences, including historically inherited mandates and structure, the agency of individuals who participated in this study – or a combination of both. On historically inherited structural differences, it has been well established in the broader literature that these may explain how the UNHCR, and IOM are positioned in relation to one another today. It is evident from the data that individuals feel strongly about their respective histories – and may interpret the cross-agency relationship accordingly. In relation to both agencies’ historical role in the wider UN system, one UNHCR interviewee stated:

IOM is the little brother that was never recognised, and therefore fights in any way possible to get the spotlight, and UNHCR did not realise that it is no longer the big kid on the block, and that there are actually others who have come up. We kind of rely on our past, instead of recognising that we are no longer the leading agency.

Indeed, based on comments from interviews and factor rankings, it is evident that Normativists are more aware of the valuable role that IOM may play in addressing disaster displacement. This may be understood as evidence for the notion that supporting IOM’s work may in turn reduce the workload for the normatively constrained UNHCR (Koch, 2014, p. 917). The competitive nature of UNHCR and IOM’s work in this area and beyond was

indicated by several non-aligned experts, who were concerned that issues between the two, while related to mandates, were grounded in agency structure. This is an important point to note, given that States created, continue to fund, and benefit from differences in said structure. This perpetuates a sense of path dependency and policy inheritances from which neither agency is immune. Other2’s insights are in line with such thinking:

That the mandates of UNHCR and IOM create tension and competition is...clear, though I would suggest this is less about mandates and more about their different constitutional and funding structures, which create antagonistic and competition-based approaches. And that these tensions are actively exploited by States for their own purposes...

Such competition-based understandings can be rooted in Hall’s theoretically driven notion that UNHCR is strictly a legal, refugee-respondent agency bound by international law and funded by Member States to carry out mandated work, while the IOM is a ‘free agent’ restricted (or exploited) by donor-needs and concerns at any given point in time. The statement included in this Q study that one agency should work only in one type of migration – forced or voluntary – is noticeably divisive. Environmental and disaster displacement is such a multi-faceted and complex issue area that a clear division may make little sense. Yet data from the UNHCR dominated perspective would make that distinction to preserve a remit over mandated work. Similarly, the first perspective is staunchly against a division of labour because it restricts the IOM’s ability to operate anywhere and everywhere, presumably influenced by the stress of a project-based agency structure reliant on donor needs. One non-aligned expert saw problems with this defensive mindset and commented that ‘*we need to get IOM up to speed, we need to get them more relaxed and to understand that there is work for everyone.*’

This study appears to demonstrate the strength of institutions, as two of the perspectives are fully or mainly comprised of representatives of only one of the two agencies. This would suggest that there are dominant framings of the issue area to which members of IOM and UNHCR subscribe. However, there is also strong evidence of the belief that it is individuals who make the difference. Specifically, interpersonal relationships may be seen as the barrier to cooperation and the reason for inter-agency tensions, as opposed to mandates, with indications that UNHCR participants feel IOM staff are responsible for this stress.

Conclusion

This paper used Q method to better understand international organizational behaviour in relation to disaster and environmental displacement, and in so doing, has contributed in many ways to the study of international organizations in emerging issue areas. Our study makes no claim to representativeness; a Q study cannot show the prevalence of perspectives in any given community. However, the study does show the existence of distinct perspectives, and in this case, it is certainly indicative of a divide in the conceptualisation of how displacement should be managed, which warrants attention given the increasing risk of displacement from environmental causes and climate change each year. This study has argued that while abstract theoretical explanations for behaviour and differences between the UNHCR and IOM offer one explanation for agency positions, they cannot entirely explain agential differences on the interpersonal or individual level. This study’s combination of such theories and empirics with Q method manages to narrow this gap. Their combined use here has highlighted that on the involvement of UNHCR and IOM in the field of environmental and disaster displacement,

conflict has arisen from a collision between different histories and new realities regarding funding, interests, and interaction. The emergence of climate displacement as an issue area in the last fifteen years has provided an opportunity for these agencies to diverge from their historically mandated tasks and practices and has led to the creation – or attempt to push for – new norms. Further, this paper has shown the importance of considering subjectivity for the investigation of agency interaction in the field of environmental and disaster displacement. It has been possible to gain deeper insights on institutions and structures that serve to both strengthen and question existing work in this area. It is also suggestive of what individual perspectives can tell us about cooperation and competition at IOs on emerging and rapidly developing issue areas. It reveals that participants believe certain outcomes and interactions are determined by personal agency. For example, while mandates encourage staff members to think or act in a particular – perhaps rigid – manner, ultimately people interpret as they see fit. Similarly, as one non-aligned expert stated, personal relationships can complicate, or indeed overcome the potential conflicts of interest and competition:

The problem with all of this, which you don't see as an academic, is that the problems are often about personalities...a country representative for IOM, whether a lady or a man, they can be a jerk, the same for UNHCR, and it can be completely dysfunctional – or the two can be the best of friends and can have meaningful cooperation.

Cross-agency division on shared issues raises interesting questions for future research, such as: 'do these agencies attract employees who align with agency beliefs and subjectivities, or do employees absorb agency perspectives once in that setting?' 'Are staff more - or less - progressive than public positions of the IOM and UNHCR suggest?' And 'is this a good or bad thing?' Although beyond the scope of this paper, further research on such questions regarding individual agency will allow IGOs to make more positive interventions which prioritise the protection of displaced persons. At the very least, consideration of individual perspectives is a worthwhile venture given environmental and disaster displacement is an issue area requiring coordination and cooperation across multiple levels of engagement.

To conclude, a significant contribution of this study has been to illustrate the potential for combining deeper empirical analysis with theories of international relations. A plethora of research has taken place over recent decades considering individuals and local community perspectives from the 'receiving end' of IO policies and projects. However, very rarely has the inverse been dealt with. To consider disaster affected populations in a monolithic manner is widely accepted as problematic, and yet this is precisely what is done in IO research. We must at least be open to the idea that perhaps individual and group perspectives matter within and between IOs as well. IOs may be usually dealt with at an 'international' scale, but to disregard the local within the international is to disregard the makeup of an organization and the idea that individuals may shape or dictate responses to rapidly emerging collective issues like climate change and disaster displacement.

APPENDIX

List of Statements Used in Q Study

Mandate and Normative

- 1) Agency staff universally believe in principles of mandate.
- 2) Debating 'climate refugees' distracts from our primary concerns.
- 3) There is a strong linkage between this topic and my agency's goals.

Mandate and Functional

- 4) Insistence on rigid principles can be inappropriate in emergency contexts.
- 5) My agency will expand into this area with adequate funding.
- 6) A donation-based funding system is not enough to tackle this issue.

Mandate and HI

- 7) IOM has a broader and more flexible mandate than the UNHCR.
- 8) The UN's human rights framework forms the basis of my agency's work.
- 9) IOM's past position outside the UN has made for key differences today.

States and Normative

- 10) Agencies may lack legitimacy and encounter resistance from States.
- 11) Migration is an area dominated by old ideas of rights and duties of States.
- 12) States are reluctant to delegate responsibility to agencies.

States and Functional

- 13) Our donors have little appetite to expand our budgets and responsibilities.
- 14) Our agencies have no direct effect on state behaviour.
- 15) Agencies should help States, but activity should be more limited and conditional.

States and HI

- 16) My agency must balance serving donors and carrying out tasks for which it was created.
- 17) Member States and their power balances affect change in these agencies.
- 18) States need to be regularly reminded to protect their populations before and after disasters.

Cooperation and Normative

- 19) UNHCR should work in forced migration, and the IOM in voluntary migration.
- 20) UN agencies have the capacity to properly address this topic together.
- 21) IOM and UNHCR's mandates generate tension and competition.

Cooperation and Functional

- 22) We have a humanitarian marketplace with limited visibility, funds and impact.
- 23) We need new private sector and civil society partnerships to address this topic.
- 24) Overemphasis on collaboration will delay and weaken decision-making.

Cooperation and HI

- 25) IOM and UNHCR often find themselves in complementary situations.
- 26) The IASC Cluster Approach is not fully exploited.
- 27) Our agencies work better together through the Cluster Approach.

Climate and Normative

- 28) Natural disasters carry less risk of controversy than other areas of our work.
- 29) Environmental change today blurs mandates of humanitarian agencies.
- 30) We do not need stronger legal measures for this area.

Climate and Functional

- 31) My agency needs to address environmental migration to stay relevant.
- 32) My agency is divided on how much to engage in climate change and mobility.
- 33) My agency has the capacity to bring about significant change in this area.

Climate and HI

- 34) Agency leadership was responsible for putting climate change on our agenda.
- 35) The Cluster System for natural disaster response is in a dysfunctional state.
- 36) A new UN entity should be created to lead on this issue.

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ENDNOTES

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- ii. Available at <https://shawnbanasick.github.io/ken-q-analysis/>