WORLD HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT

Initial Scoping Paper – WHS Theme 1: Humanitarian Effectiveness

Rationale

The World Humanitarian Summit will set the agenda for work beyond 2016 to make humanitarian action more effective, inclusive, and global – and overall, fit for the future. In the lead-up to the summit, discussions and consultations will focus on several core themes that have emerged from policy discussions over the years: 1) humanitarian effectiveness, 2) reducing vulnerability and managing risk, 3) transformation through innovation, and 4) serving the needs of people in conflict. The aim of the consultations on these themes is for them to be open and transparent and capture the views of all humanitarian stakeholders.

This set of initial scoping papers on each of the four themes is a preliminary attempt by the WHS secretariat to open the discussion on each theme and offer a brief and non-exhaustive background and set of possible topics or research questions to explore based on the work and conversations happening already in regional and global policy forums and meetings of humanitarians and partners around the globe. Constructive feedback from partners on these 'living documents' is welcome and will be used to help these initial ideas evolve, in order to provide a basis to guide and facilitate technical, regional and online consultations leading up to the 2016 summit.

Background on 'Humanitarian effectiveness'

There is wide-spread recognition that the humanitarian landscape has changed tremendously over the past few decades, and that humanitarian action will need to continue to improve and become more effective to keep pace with the rapidly changing context of emergencies and to meet the needs of millions of people.

The humanitarian community has long since recognized the need to improve its effectiveness and significant progress has been made over the years through a host of initiatives. These initiatives have made great strides in advancing concepts such as professionalization of humanitarian actors, good donor practices and principles, and humanitarian standards and codes of conduct for the provision of aid. Efforts to improve humanitarian financing through pooled funds have also done much over the years to improve speed and flexibility of humanitarian funding, as well as coordinating overall response. The international humanitarian system has continued to strengthen its organizational effectiveness and performance - most recently through the IASC's Transformative Agenda – which has focused on strengthening coordination, leadership, partnership, humanitarian financing and accountability.

These initiatives and many others have improved humanitarian action, but they have largely focused on the effectiveness of the international humanitarian system[1]. The scope of the work leading up to the WHS will be much broader. Yes, there may be key aspects concerning the international humanitarian system itself that the Summit can address, but the scope of this theme is overall effectiveness of humanitarian action. *How can the humanitarian needs of people affected by crises be most effectively met?* Who is best placed to meet those needs? And how can humanitarian needs be met in a more sustainable manner?

Stronger cooperation among stakeholders in humanitarian action

It is the primary responsibility of the national and local authorities of the country affected to meet the needs of people affected by crisis. This theme will explore how the international community can better support and build upon national and local response efforts, rather than often trying to bring in separate arrangements. There has been a significant rise in the capacity of many countries' National Disaster Management Authorities to prepare for and respond to humanitarian crises. There has also been rising bilateral assistance to affected countries from middle-income countries. But the international humanitarian system has not sufficiently evolved to address these trends and reorient its work to supporting and complementing national capacity whenever possible.

It is critical that actors involved in humanitarian action understand what affected people and communities need and are doing to meet their own needs. During and after any humanitarian crisis, affected people and local actors are the first responders and will be the most likely to first have direct access to people in need as well as remain there and support their recovery. National and local responders are also more likely work within existing infrastructure and markets, which can improve the sustainability of response efforts. While humanitarians coming from outside the immediate community can bring much expertise and capacity, they can also fail to acknowledge and build upon these local and national responses. What are the best practices or systemic changes needed in order to ensure stronger partnership with local actors and that international humanitarian assistance is better informed by local needs?

In addition to the increasing capacities and expertise of national authorities and local responders, many more or new actors have also become engaged in humanitarian action, including militaries, national and international businesses, "digital humanitarians" and diaspora groups, among others. A key aspect of humanitarian effectiveness is understanding better how each type of actor contributes to humanitarian action and ensuring their capacity, resources and expertise are best

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[1] Definitions for this system vary. The UN Secretary-General's 2013 report on Strengthening Humanitarian Coordination broadly defines the international humanitarian system as "the network of international humanitarian actors who are functionally connected through the framework for coordination established by the General Assembly in its resolution 46/182 and its subsequent resolutions, which includes the Emergency Relief Coordinator, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and planning and financing mechanisms, and are guided by a commitment to the guiding principles, humanitarian principles and international law.

leveraged for a more effective humanitarian response. The theme will explore how all the major actors involved in humanitarian action can better 'inter-operate' with each other. What types of platforms for engagement, cooperation and coordination are needed, and what are the common objectives and standards needed among each of these actor groups, so they can work together to more effectively address humanitarian needs?

Importance of the context of the crisis

The demands for humanitarian action and how it can most effectively be delivered are different depending on the context of the humanitarian situation. Many factors affect the context, but two of the main ones include what type of crisis the situation is: sudden onset disaster, slow-onset disaster, a conflict or complex emergency, a chronic vulnerability situation or a combination of these, and the capacity and enabling environment established by the host government or parties to a conflict. The international humanitarian community's response should be tailored more specifically to the context to ensure more effective response – it would be quite different in a sudden onset disaster where regional, national and local response capacity is strong vs. a conflict situation where the government is party to the conflict. According to each context, which actors are best placed to respond, who should lead or coordinate the response, and what goals need to be met? In addition, as the world continues to urbanize, this factor of the context must also be addressed in how humanitarian actors can more effectively meet people's needs.

The varying contexts question (among others) has also featured in the aid effectiveness agenda for the development sector over the past decade. This theme can also analyze what aspects from the development aid effectiveness process could be relevant for the humanitarian effectiveness discussion, or what lessons should be learned from that process. This necessarily brings out the discussion on the difference between humanitarian action and development – that the former's central aim is saving lives and alleviating suffering of people through action that is guided by the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. In this changing humanitarian landscape with new actors (not necessarily humanitarian) involved in humanitarian response, how can the awareness of and application of humanitarian principles improve the effectiveness of humanitarian action?

Accountability

The theme should also address the various types of accountability within the humanitarian sector and how competing levels of and gaps in accountability impact the effectiveness of humanitarian action. Attention on accountability over the years has largely focused on accountability of humanitarian actors in the system towards each other for their performance, and accountability of the humanitarian system and its actors to affected people through providing a more needs-based approach. Accountability to taxpayers in donor countries has also given rise to looking at effectiveness in terms of cost effectiveness and value for money. There has been less

of a focus on accountability towards affected governments, although addressing this concept is increasingly called for by a number of actors, particularly in disaster relief work.

Possible shifts in the humanitarian sector

The humanitarian effectiveness theme could explore and debate the viability and relevance of encouraging wholesale shifts to occur, most of which have been occurring in a more ad hoc manner or on a smaller scale:

- A shift to a more anticipatory approach from a responsive one;
- A shift to a more needs-based approach from a largely supply-driven enterprise;
- A shift to complementing and supporting existing local and national capacities, infrastructure and markets from the beginning of crisis, rather than bringing in outside arrangements, where appropriate;
- A shift to a more regional-based approach from a global one, when international assistance is required;
- A shift to a humanitarian system that inter-operates with related actors in a manner that leverages expertise and resources to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of each response;
- A shift toward building specialized capacity and expertise to meet people's needs in urban environments of different types and of non-camp type situations, as global trends of rapid urbanization draw the focus beyond providing services in more traditional rural environments and camp settings;
- A shift towards having distinct working parameters according to different contexts: the type of emergency and the capacity and enabling environment established by the host government (recognizing that many humanitarian emergencies cannot be neatly categorized and may fall into two or three categories).

Humanitarian Financing

Any potential evolutions in the humanitarian sector would need to be underpinned by a concrete incentive structure for change. Such an incentive structure would need to be grounded in humanitarian financing policies or models that seek to meet humanitarian needs most effectively in the fast changing humanitarian landscape.

Possible research questions

These proposed questions reflect a selection of some of the key topics that could be part of the theme, many of which are already being analyzed, discussed and tested by humanitarians today. They are categories of issues to explore – building on the basis of the significant work underway - and are not exhaustive but rather an initial proposal to start the discussion of what an agenda on 'humanitarian effectiveness' might address.

- **Working with and accountability to affected people and governments:** What are the programmatic, funding, organizational or behavioural shifts required to strengthen the accountability of humanitarian assistance to the people and governments who receive assistance? How can humanitarian action contribute to national priorities while bearing in mind that in some contexts, these may not directly match with the needs or expectations that affected people have and might convey to international humanitarian actors?

- **Building upon local and national responses to emergencies:** What are the best practices or systemic changes required to set up/enable the international humanitarian system to support local response efforts in more complementary ways, rather than trying to contribute separate arrangements?

- **Models for engagement in different contexts**: Many guidelines, standards, and codes of conduct exist for actors in the international humanitarian system. Should guidelines and standards better take into account the specific context of emergencies including type of emergency and the capacity and enabling environment of the host government?

- **Mechanisms to support better inter-operability among actors engaged in humanitarian action:** Should there be "standard operating procedures" or mechanisms for how the international humanitarian response system works with other actors – the private sector, military, regional organizations and others, etc...? What is the incentive structure for all these actors to work together, or at least reinforce each other's actions to close gaps where they exist? How can each group leverage and complement the capacities of others to meet the needs of affected people in more coordinated and coherent ways, while making sure humanitarian assistance is best meeting the needs of people?

- **The humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence**: How can they make humanitarian action more effective? Are there best practices for raising awareness of the four

principles and translating them into operational realities in different contexts? How might awareness of the meaning of these principles be raised both within the international humanitarian system and with other actors?

- **Humanitarian financing:** What is the role of humanitarian financing [and the global and national mechanisms in place to coordinate, channel and monitor aid flows] as part of an overall incentive structure to make wholesale shifts in humanitarian action to make it more effective? How does humanitarian financing for humanitarian action fit in with long-term plans for financing for development and other aid that are being re-examined as part of the post-2015 development agenda and other strategic processes?

- **Information management and needs assessment:** How can the humanitarian community make better use of organizing data so that that it can be used efficiently for actors to respond to people's needs? Better data would also assist in monitoring impact, tracking vulnerability and seeing aid flows.

Points of intersection with the other three themes

The three other themes all contribute to the overall effectiveness of humanitarian action. The consultations on 'reducing vulnerability and managing risk' will be focusing on working with local actors, building resilience of local communities to humanitarian crisis, working with development actors, and supporting a shift towards a more anticipatory approach to preventing and managing the risks of humanitarian crisis. The consultations on the 'serving the needs of people in conflict' theme will be looking at how humanitarian action can more effectively meet the humanitarian assistance and protection needs of people in conflict settings. The 'transformation through innovation' theme's consultations will be focusing on how the humanitarian sector can make use of innovations in approaches, processes and technology in order to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian action.

The World Humanitarian Summit process is taking place during a time of major strategic planning in international affairs taking place across sectors closely related to humanitarian work (such as the post-2015 development and disaster risk reduction agendas), so should be coherent with and cognizant of the changes and discussions that these initiatives recognize more broadly.

Ways the theme could be developed through regional and online consultations

Efforts will be made to cross-fertilize the discussions happening on each theme, as well as to ensure that issue-specific points from face-to-face consultations and online discussions are captured to inform the agenda. For example, each regional meeting will address the four broad themes of the summit, but the agenda for each will be designed and adapted to reflect the realities and priorities of humanitarian action in the region. Certain themes and issues may be prioritized and specialized topics may be included in the meeting agenda as appropriate. The WHS secretariat and the thematic teams will work closely with the Regional Steering Groups for each regional consultation to determine which issues and angles on each issue are most relevant to understanding and capturing the concerns of regional, national and local-level practitioners.

A space will be set up on the web platform to host discussions and information exchange on each theme. Issue-specific discussions or debates will be moderated online in different languages, in particular around key WHS events, to activate broader participation in setting the agenda for each theme. On the web platform, people will also be able to share studies they are working on, participate virtually in real-time moderated debates or presentations, interact using social media and learn about events in their region.

For more information on the summit, please visit www.worldhumanitariansummit.org.