Online Consultation Summary Report
Latin America and the Caribbean

16 March – 10 April 2015

This report summarizes the online comments and contributions received as part of the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) global online consultation for Latin America and the Caribbean. The report will inform the regional consultation meeting in Guatemala City, Guatemala on 5-7 May 2015, and be integrated into the formation of priorities for the first WHS in 2016.

About the online consultation

The moderated[1] discussion forum provided an open, public forum[2] to provoke debate and stimulate thinking about how to keep humanitarian action fit for the future, in order to inform the regional consultation meeting. Participation in the forum was open to anyone who registered, from any origin or location. **More than 2,800 individuals viewed the discussions and 232 comments were received in English and Spanish**, representing a broad range of countries and organizations.[3]

A total of nine questions were discussed, sparking lively debate around the four themes of the WHS, as well as cross-cutting issues and other topics of regional interest. The discussion questions were developed by the Discussion Chair and Moderators in consultation with the OCHA Regional Office and WHS secretariat.

Key recommendations from the Moderators

1. Improve humanitarian actors', including government and authorities, awareness of and commitment to the **humanitarian principles**, ensuring humanitarian access, guaranteeing protection and security and community participation.

2. Establish coherent and coordinated **assessment, monitoring and evaluation** systems to: ensure appropriate needs assessment and consideration of local context, measure humanitarian impact, improve accountability and ensure adequate, accurate adjustment of interventions and strategies to ensure integrated approaches.

3. Recognize **innovation** as an important driver for improving humanitarian assistance. This requires mainstreaming multi-directional and open sharing mechanisms to enable the development of new technologies and innovative approaches by new stakeholders in addition to the existing humanitarian intuitions.

Discussion Questions

Part 1 of the discussion consisted of four initial questions focused on how to make humanitarian action fit for future challenges. In part two, five follow-up questions were posted by the Chair and Moderators.

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[1] The discussion took place at: www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/whs_lac, chaired by Iñigo Barrena, IFRC Pan-American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU), Panama and moderated by Jeremy Collymore, University of the West Indies, Jamaica, Simone Lucatello, Mora Institute, Mexico, Enrique Torrella Raymond, Norwegian Refugee Council, Panama and Lorena Nieto, UNHCR, Colombia.

[2] The discussion was publicized through a number of channels including humanitarian and development media and networks such as ReliefWeb, IRIN, United Nations (UN) agencies and NGOs, through UN Member States, social media and via emails to various humanitarian groups.

[3] Comments were received from individuals, national governments, international NGOs, regional institutions, community-based organizations, research organizations, donor organizations and independent consultants, based at headquarters, regional and national offices and in the field.

Table 1: Number of comments received to each question[4]

Questions	Comments
Part 1:	
1. HUMANITARIAN EFFECTIVENESS: What is most critical to ensure that humanitarian action meets the needs of people affected by disasters and crisis in the region?	46
2. REDUCING VULNERABILITY AND MANAGING RISK: What may be the major threats and challenges faced in the future and what are the implications of this for humanitarian preparedness and response in the region?	42
3. TRANSFORMATION THROUGH INNOVATION: Innovation is the new buzz-word. But what does it mean in the context of humanitarian action in the LAC region? Where can innovations help improve humanitarian action?	15
4. VIOLENCE AND DISPLACEMENT: What are the obstacles that humanitarian organizations face in order to accomplish their mission in the context of violence due to organized crime and gangs? How can we provide humanitarian assistance in such an environment?	60
Part 2:	
1. HUMANITARIAN EFFECTIVENESS: How can we better use information and communications technologies (ICTs) in the planning and execution of humanitarian action?	10
2. REDUCING VULNERABILITY AND MANAGING RISK: How can we improve humanitarian response to the LAC region's most recurrent disasters? In this sense, could the Cluster Approach increase the effectiveness of humanitarian action in the region?	21
3. TRANSFORMATION THROUGH INNOVATION: From your experience, what examples can you share where innovation (both technological and social) can improve humanitarian action?	25
4. VIOLENCE AND DISPLACEMENT: How can we ensure coordinated, appropriate interventions that consider different groups' specific needs, in situations of high level violence without state presence or security? What should be the role of humanitarian organizations in these contexts?	7
5. SERVING THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE IN CONFLICT: How can we integrate peacebuilding principles into humanitarian efforts in the LAC region, while still preserving the principles of impartiality and neutrality? Please share your examples.	6
Total comments:	**232**

Discussion Summary

Detailed summaries of the contributions to the discussion are annexed below in the interim summary and available on the website. The discussion engaged a diversity of humanitarian actors inclusive of intergovernmental organizations, private sector, students, activists, international NGOs and community level people.

1. Humanitarian Effectiveness

What is most critical to ensure that humanitarian action is meeting the needs of people affected by disaster and crises in the region?

The key issues that emerged called for a) humanitarian access, b) strong and enlightened leadership, c) improved coordination through prior awareness of community assets, enhanced logistics and team building through plan development and testing, d) accessible financing, e) recognition of and building upon local/regional existing systems, f) response teams that are skilled

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Humanitarian Effectiveness

Key recommendations:

1. Improve humanitarian actors' awareness of and commitment to the **principles of humanitarian action**.
2. Improve understanding of the **context** of intervention anchored in **capacity mapping** and mechanisms for accessing and sharing such data.
3. Provide a comprehensive picture of humanitarian **financing**, including assessment of the contributions of volunteers, the diaspora and local private sector.
4. Mainstream systematized mechanisms **for evaluating effectivenes**s at all levels.
5. Review all humanitarian planning tools and assumptions based on the increasing number of **mega and extreme events.**

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[4] Many participants posted more than once and responded to more than one discussion question.

and equipped, g) detailed and time-sensitive needs assessments.

Improved and enhanced **coordination** was suggested as perhaps the most critical emerging issue with regard to *"meeting the needs of people affected by disaster and crises in this regions,"* and the discussion concluded that this requires conscious action by players at all levels of the humanitarian action system.

The discussion highlighted the need for humanitarian actors to better capture available **data** and ensure that it is accessible to decision-makers. In addition to improving coordination, it was suggested that this could lead to a better understanding of the context of interventions, including potential and actual loss estimation from humanitarian crises. Participants also suggested that capacity and **capability assessments** of potential local and external partners would be of value in developing context-specific responses. Standards seem to be a relevant issue here. The online discussion also addressed the need for **scenario planning** to inform more effective action. Also underpinning the recommendations for improved coordination was the importance of Information and Communication Technologies (**ICTs**).

The issue of the adequacy of **financing** of humanitarian action was also raised and elaborated in one instance. Matters addressed included the **timeliness of receipt, flexibility in use and the limited time to utilize** humanitarian funds. The idea of limiting financing to certified humanitarian organizations was also put on the table; however moderators commented that this could lead to elitism in the global humanitarian system. With the persistent call for the **use of more local communities** as the foundation of a sustainable, global humanitarian network, there will be some inevitable clashes on the philosophical and ideological dispositions herein. The moderators recommended that the matter should be placed on the table for open, transparent and equitable debate in the lead up to the WHS.

Another issue that also needs elevation in the humanitarian discourse is the challenge of **"mega" or extreme events**. Discussion participants pointed out that these shake the assumptions that underpin the current global humanitarian architecture and may require a revisit of existing approaches and tools.

In many respects, the discussion concluded that many of the basic actions required to improve humanitarian effectiveness are already known and agreed, but lack the commitment to bring them to implementation.

2. Reducing Vulnerability and Managing Risk

Part one of the discussion on vulnerability and risk focused on a) broad substantive questions about the major threats and challenges for the region in terms of humanitarian action and b) how innovation can be considered a tool for improving humanitarian response in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Part two tried to deepen the discussions by looking into more personal perspectives on improving humanitarian assistance in the region.

Major humanitarian threats and challenges for the region and how to address them

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Reducing Vulnerability and Managing Risk

Key recommendations:

1. **Demarcate clear responsibilities** at central and sub-governmental level to strengthen the processes of decentralization of responsibilities and resources during humanitarian action, through better and improved mechanisms for accessing and delivering resources.
2. Call for **appropriate governance**, define clear responsibilities across public and private actors and establish appropriate accountability mechanisms.
3. Strengthen **monitoring and accountability tools** to ensure better delivery and coordination of humanitarian action in the region.
4. **Improve community organizations** and their practices by innovating and testing solutions. Ensure further collaboration between stakeholders to sustain and scale-up these solutions, and to integrate them into better planning during emergencies.
5. **Engage citizens** through advocacy and public awareness as critical to stimulate social demand and define priorities to officials during and after humanitarian action.
6. **Engage Youth** as having specific needs in terms of participation in humanitarian action and education.

During Part 1 comments posted by participants ranged from identifying possible threats and challenges to humanitarian preparedness and response in the region, to the topics of **better coordination among donors**. Participants also suggested the need to address diverse issues including **fragmentation, resource mobilization and fair delivery of humanitarian assistance**. Other reflections touched upon the issue of the **role of the media** during and after emergencies. Participants pointed out that in times of conflict and humanitarian crises the media can play a double role. On one hand they serve a significant positive role in conflict situations by giving live and updated information about the situation on the ground, but it can also act as a force to cause the situation to escalate.

Many participants also called for efforts to clearly **demarcate responsibilities** at the central and sub governmental level (such as provincial, district or municipal levels) to strengthen the processes of decentralization of responsibilities and resources during humanitarian action, through better and improved mechanisms for accessing and delivering resources.

A crucial issue raised was the call for **appropriate governance**, defined as the system of norms, institutions and interactions that determine how decisions are made and enforced for humanitarian action. Participants suggested that this issue should be put at the core of the international debate for the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. Commenters also pointed out the need to identify gaps and challenges related to the definition of **clear responsibilities** across public and private actors and the establishment of appropriate **accountability mechanisms**.

Participants suggested that **monitoring and accountability instruments** should be emphasized as a means to improve delivery and coordination of humanitarian assistance in the region. Participants pointed out that the inherent diversity of practices and responses within the region is in itself a resource but thought that some common standards must be agreed. Another general point that came out of the discussion is that there is no need to seek to develop new legal standards, but rather to build consensus among stakeholders on the elements of a humanitarian agenda, the outcomes of which may be taken up at domestic, regional and global levels and lead to new laws, soft law instruments or binding agreements for humanitarian action.

Related to this, the discussion emphasized the importance of **coordination**, which implies the use of policy instruments to deliver humanitarian assistance in a cohesive and effective manner, rather than in working in an ad hoc way. To reduced vulnerability and manage risk, those instruments include strategic planning, gathering data and managing information. Resource mobilization is also a key part.

The discussion also highlighted that **citizens' engagement** through advocacy and public awareness is critical to stimulate social demand and define priorities to officials during and after humanitarian action. Current developments in information and communications technologies (ICTs) are engaging and informing citizens and connecting people between individuals and communities at all levels. Systematic efforts to include these tools in humanitarian efforts promise to deliver accelerated results. **Youth** were also singled out as having specific needs in terms of participation in humanitarian action and education.

Participants also highlighted that **international cooperation actors**, particularly bilateral and multilateral donors and NGOs, have a key role in supporting national-level mechanisms to implement more flexible, integrated humanitarian relief programmes.

In response to the Moderator's question of whether the **Cluster Approach** could increase the effectiveness of humanitarian action in the region, participants noted that it has already proved effective, suggesting that it is a worthwhile mechanism to pursue. However, they also cautioned that there are many challenges associated with the approach that must be revised and improved.

Another point raised by participants was the issue of **available supplies**, not only during the stage of preparation for an emergency but also during the acquisition, survey, identification and locating of supplies for community

relief. It was suggested that various suppliers, both locally and across geographic regions, must engage to contribute to disaster management. On this subject, one participant called for surveying and including a wide range of products and services that are useful for humanitarian action.

3. Transformation through Innovation

How innovation can improve humanitarian response in the region

Part one of the discussion on innovation focused on how innovation can be considered a tool for improving humanitarian response in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Part two tried to deepen the discussions by sharing successful good practices in innovation for humanitarian response in the region.

The discussion highlighted how, within the humanitarian sector, innovation is often understood as a material product or is associated with physical technologies, where the 'innovation' label can be linked to a concrete material outcome. However, examples of innovation can include transformation processes, such as promoting inclusion, participation and fostering self-reliance within communities. It can also include open participation in important decision-making processes like the WHS online consultation platform.

Several mechanisms and operational areas were identified and shared among participants about the role of innovation and how it can be successfully implemented. One element that emerged strongly is the need for **clear innovation instruments**. Participants felt that humanitarian innovation in fact falls into the institutionalised practice of a small

> **Transformation through Innovation**
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> **Key Recommendations:**
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> 1. **Recognize innovation as an important driver** for improving humanitarian assistance in the region. There were calls for an integrated approach that embraces disaster risk reduction practices and better local management for humanitarian assistance.
> 2. **Explore existing innovation instruments.** Humanitarian innovation falls into the institutionalized practice of a small number of humanitarian actors, and which focuses on upwards accountability to donors and traditionally takes a more 'top-down' approach in implementing solutions for affected populations;
> 3. **Build new 'bottom-up' practices** for improving humanitarian innovation and seek approaches to address the challenge of innovation by including different stakeholders.
> 4. **Develop action plans that include innovation practices** to be matched with national development planning exercises in order to mainstream humanitarian responses.
> 5. **Increase the network of available supplies during the emergency**, not only during the preparation stage but also during the acquisition, survey, identification and locating of supplies for community relief.
> 6. **Professionalize the sector** that leads to the development of core competencies in humanitarian work, which can then form the basis of targeted knowledge transfer and skills development.

number of humanitarian actors which focus on upward accountability to donors and traditionally take a more 'top-down' approach to implementing solutions for affected populations. They emphasised that it is also important to build new 'bottom-up' practices to improve humanitarian innovation and seek new ways forward to address the challenge of innovation by including different stakeholders.

Participants pointed out that in the region, **community organizations** are also improving their practices and are already innovating and testing solutions. In order to sustain and scale-up these solutions, and to integrate these into better planning during emergencies, further collaboration between stakeholders must be properly addressed.

Recognizing innovation as an important driver for improving humanitarian effectiveness in the region, there were calls for an **integrated approach** that embraces **disaster risk reduction** practices and better **local management** for humanitarian action. Some participants called specifically for the development of action plans that include innovation practices to be matched with national development planning exercises in order to mainstream humanitarian responses.

Other innovation tools proposed during the discussion include **better risk maps**, which are increasingly used more often and more effectively in LAC. They are a tool for disaster risk management that contributes to

identifying the threats and dangers for a community, a region, a country, a supranational region and its vulnerabilities.

Innovation can also include the effort to **professionalize the sector** that leads to the development of core competencies in humanitarian work, which can then form the basis of targeted knowledge transfer and skills development.

4. Violence and Displacement

In part one of the discussion, participants discussed the obstacles that humanitarian organizations face in order to accomplish their mission in the context of violence due to organized crime and gangs and how to provide humanitarian assistance. In part two, participants looked at how to ensure coordinated, appropriate interventions that consider different groups' specific needs, in situations of high level violence without state presence or security, and the role of humanitarian organizations.

Participants raised relevant issues regarding i) protection gaps and humanitarian needs in urban contexts; ii) challenges in the identification of emerging armed groups associated with generalized violence and organized crime, iii) sustainability, and iv) humanitarian workers´ role and work conditions in volatile contexts.

Participants discussed the ways in which urban contexts are a challenge for humanitarian interventions. They felt that communities face social

> **Violence and Displacement**
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> **Key Recommendations**
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> 1. Ensure coordinated, articulated and complementary interventions in compliance with **humanitarian principles**, as well as transparency and information sharing that prioritizes humanitarian needs over specific agendas.
> 2. Approach **structural causes** to prevent new risk scenarios, reduce vulnerability and ensure government ownership and leadership: Although emergency response is necessary, it should be a phase in the medium-long term action to tackle structural causes, whether in development or humanitarian interventions.
> 3. **Avoid standardized interventions** that ignore existing capacities, communities' needs and armed actors´ interests, capacities and profiles. Lack of community-based approaches jeopardizes the impact and security conditions for humanitarian workers and affected people.
> 4. **Strengthen selection processes** in humanitarian organizations to ensure sensitivity, neutrality, respect and commitment to humanitarian principles and codes of conduct and improve staff security and wellness procedures.
> 5. Promote **coordinated advocacy strategies** towards regional governmental mechanisms to address humanitarian and protection needs, to technically assist the design and implementation of programmes and projects that address structural causes and ensure compliance with international and regional instruments and legal frameworks.

and territorial control from diverse armed groups who impose this control through intimidation and terror strategies such as dispossession of houses, sexual harassment and violence, forced recruitment, war taxes, threats, curfews and public punishments. The discussion also highlighted how the humanitarian space has reduced. Participants cautioned that humanitarian organizations' presence can negatively impact affected communities, sharing the example of Honduras where armed groups have imposed taxes to authorize the entry of humanitarian organizations, posing a new dilemma for compliance with humanitarian principles.

Participants raised how the lack of recognition of these armed groups by governments or even other humanitarian actors presents an obstacle for advocacy strategies that aim to address the discussion from a humanitarian perspective about the impact of violence in communities regardless of the characteristics of the perpetrator as established in International Humanitarian Law. In many countries in the region governments have decided to address these groups as common delinquency, limiting a comprehensive interpretation in accordance with international legal frameworks. Protection is then reduced and situations like forced displacement and forced recruitment are made invisible.

Participants also felt that the accuracy of interventions in these contexts is compromised, since the involvement of affected communities in the design and implementation could raise their exposure to risk. The identification of specific needs requires presence, trust-building, and time; these aspects are limited in high control areas and

low institutional presence. Without the direct participation of communities interventions create dependence, weaken their own protection and resistance mechanisms, and affect sustainability. All of this, in the long run, could represent closure of the humanitarian space.

The discussion highlighted how humanitarian workers' roles in such contexts are challenged. Compliance with humanitarian principles is a must, in addition to coordinating with development actors in order to prevent duplication, overlapping and contradiction. Mainstreaming protection perspectives in all interventions can define not only the maintenance of humanitarian space, but the lives of humanitarian workers and affected communities.

Comments on this report are welcomed. Please post online at: www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/whs_lac or send to: lac@whsummit.org.

Detailed summaries of the contributions to the discussion can be found in the interim summaries annexed below and available on the website.

This report was drafted by the Discussion Chair and Moderators with support from the WHS secretariat, OCHA LAC Regional Office and UN Online Volunteers: Christelle Cazabat (France), Lyndall King (UK), Tina Mason (UK) and Maira Belén Vásquez (Argentina).