

## MEETING SUMMARY

### **BACKGROUND**

The Secretary-General's Five-Year Action Agenda prioritizes strengthening humanitarian aid and promoting a "global declaration and agenda on humanitarian aid transparency and effectiveness." He has also set out the goal of convening a World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in 2015. OCHA has begun a consultative process to determine what such a global declaration and agenda would entail, and to generate ideas on how a Humanitarian Summit might contribute to more effective humanitarian action.

On 7 May, the Permanent Mission of the Principality of Liechtenstein and OCHA held a consultative workshop that brought together the representatives of Algeria, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, European Union, Fiji, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Kenya, Norway, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, Turkey, Sweden, Switzerland, Timor-Leste, and the United States of America in order to:

- Build a common understanding of humanitarian effectiveness;
- Solicit ideas for building support for a humanitarian effectiveness agenda; and
- Introduce and build momentum towards the World Humanitarian Summit.

Key questions that were asked during the discussion were:

- *What does humanitarian aid effectiveness mean to you?*
- *What do you see as its component parts?*
- *What would a Summit Agenda for Humanitarian Effectiveness look like?*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The representative of the Principality of Liechtenstein thanked participants for taking part in this first informal discussion with Member States on humanitarian aid effectiveness. OCHA provided an overview of thinking on the World Humanitarian Summit and humanitarian aid effectiveness. The Summit was an opportunity to set the agenda for the future and identify areas to further improve the work of humanitarian responders – whether a part of the international system or not. The Summit was an opportunity to engage all the stakeholders in humanitarian action: Member States including affected countries and donors, the wider international humanitarian system organizations, affected people and experts and academics.

One of the themes had been identified as humanitarian aid effectiveness, which was fundamentally about delivering humanitarian assistance in a more accountable and effective way. He stated that there was very little research on humanitarian effectiveness specifically and there was therefore an opportunity to define what it meant and to better understand the constituent elements. He saw several different potential approaches to thinking on effectiveness.

One was a higher order discussion on whether a humanitarian effort in a country is, in total, effective. This discussion looked at a range of issues and ways of conceptualizing accountability such as performance, “value for money”, professionalization, accountability, transparency, coordination and coherence, trust and recognition, principles, standards, ownership and relevance. It was still an open question on whether overall effectiveness could be measured from these constituent elements.

Other discussions were grounded in the need to look at the different realities and contexts where humanitarians were working: conflict, natural disaster, and situations of acute vulnerability, as well as the different perspectives of governments, affected people and others to understand different models for effectiveness.

Another area was around the technical measurement of what is effective aid with a focus on impacts and outcomes. This was an area that was still quite controversial, with a wide range of viewpoints.

## KEY POINTS

Over a wide-ranging discussion, participants touched on a number of key issues including:

### *The goal of humanitarian action*

There was a strong consensus that the fundamental goal of humanitarian response was saving lives and alleviating suffering, and that all efforts around improving effectiveness had to keep this as the baseline. One participant suggested that what mattered was “doing the right thing and not whether it is done rightly”. The differences in opinion were not really over what effectiveness was, but over what were the best means to achieve successful humanitarian outcomes. Beyond that it was agreed that a universal definition of humanitarian effectiveness did not exist.

### *Core elements of effectiveness*

It was agreed that there were many core elements associated with effectiveness, but the humanitarian community was still at the nascent stages of determining how they contributed to effectiveness overall. Core elements mentioned included (more details in Annex 1):

- Performance (including professionalization);
- Accountability (including transparency, trust building and risk management);
- Coordination (both within the international humanitarian system and with governments);
- Contextualization (type of emergency and type of stakeholder);
- Principles and standards;
- Relevance (timeliness, appropriateness and adequacy);
- Ownership by governments and inclusivity;
- Capacity ( of governments and the international humanitarian system),

- Resilience and preparedness,
- Innovation; and
- Access to people.

There was also an effort to understand what the key gaps and blockages were under specific elements. For example on the question of timeliness, it was noted that an important element included funding mechanisms, such as CERF, and how to ensure that sufficient and flexible funds were available when they were needed.

### *Context matters*

Critical to any agenda on effectiveness was recognizing that what constituted effectiveness is different depending on the divergent contextual realities of today's humanitarian crises (e.g. natural disasters versus conflicts, versus situations of chronic vulnerability) and the perspective of the stakeholder (affected government, donor, humanitarian organization, affected people). So while the overall goal of saving lives and reducing suffering was the same, which components of effectiveness were the most critical would differ. With access to people in need, for example, being a critical component of effectiveness in conflict situations. There was also a need to think about the issues of specialization and diversity among humanitarian actors and recognize that certain organizations were simply better suited to responding to certain contexts.

### *National ownership and the role of local actors*

Several participants stressed the importance of recognizing the leading role and need for ownership by national authorities. It was emphasized that there were an increasing number of middle income countries that were requesting more technical support rather than direct intervention by international actors. In that context it was noted that a major issue has often been the lack of coordination both within national institutions and with the international humanitarian system, and that while many countries were improving, there was a need for capacity building on internal coordination.

Another challenge raised was ensuring that there was a balance between the capacity of governments to monitor and coordinate with the often large number of humanitarian actors. While strong national leadership should be the standard in the vast majority of cases, it was acknowledged that in certain conflict settings this was not always possible. One participant stressed the need for greater risk-sharing with donors in the sense of allowing post-conflict or fragile countries to take a greater leadership role. Otherwise some countries would move away from the multi-lateral system and towards more bi-lateral relationships. Another participant responded that by nature humanitarian crises frequently required multi-lateral responses, but that it was worth further examining the role of bi-lateral assistance in certain cases.

A theme in the discussion was the need to reflect on the role of national governments and how it will be conceptualized in the future. One participant suggested that until recently, humanitarian action had been based on assuming the worst case of a government that was unable or unwilling to exist. But the reality of expanding national capacities meant that a new compact should be based around a scenario of

engaged and empowered governments responsible for responding to the needs of their people. However, the other side of this was the need for a formalized process to recognize when governments were not living up to their responsibilities and were not capable of leading a humanitarian response.

At the sub-national and community level, local actors were seen as key first-responders whose actions were often definitive in determining whether a humanitarian response was effective. A few participants suggested that there was a need to think about how to understand effective response at the local level and to find ways to enhance their capacity and also for the system to learn from the efforts of first responders. One participant noted that following Cyclone Nargis, by the time humanitarian organizations had arrived, local groups were already well into their response. Another key issue was ensuring that resources were locally sourced and local capacity was fully used before outside resources were brought in.

### *Accountability*

There was agreement that, while accountability to affected people needed to be the focus, it was not always clear what that meant in practice. However, feedback mechanisms and the need for a discussion with aid recipients were recognized as core elements of any accountability framework. It was also important to ensure that a gender perspective was incorporated.

Beyond accountability to affected people, there was a discussion around the need for accountability to donors, to national governments, and among humanitarian organizations. In this context, there was some discussion on the importance of the “value for money” concept. Some participants maintained that ensuring effective use of resources was in the interest of everyone, not just donors, while others felt that while it was clearly reasonable to ask that recipients be accountable for money they received, that the concept was too “business-like” and didn’t seem entirely in-line with humanitarian principles.

One participant expressed a concern that the danger in talking about “effectiveness” was that it could embroil humanitarian funding in “bureaucratic processes” and audits that it had been exempt from until now, as it was understood that the funds were directly for saving lives and therefore shouldn’t be held to the same standards as development aid. Another participant stressed that the nature of humanitarian work also meant that it was important to not be too risk-averse and to allow for room for mistakes, citing the example of Somalia where it was known that 1 in 3 dollars wouldn’t reach recipients, but aid was still needed and provided. On the question of what the role of political and national interests were, participants stressed that we had to be honest about the political interests of different stakeholders and take them into account, while others stressed that crisis shouldn’t be used as an opportunity to advance political interests, particularly by donors.

### *Principles, Standards and Initiatives*

Participants endorsed the importance of the core humanitarian principles; however, a

few participants called for an overhaul of 46/182 to include current realities and issues like capacity building in the guiding principles in some fashion. Other participants maintained that 46/182 remained the basis for the system and the effectiveness discussion should proceed from that. Other participants maintained that it was important to maintain a distinction between humanitarian actors who adhered to the core principles, and those operating outside the system, while nevertheless encouraging a variety of actors and inter-operability with other networks, actors and systems.

Several participants suggested that the effectiveness agenda should be more on finding common standards and encouraging interoperability rather than one overarching definition. Some standards would be needed that applied in all contexts but others would apply only in specific ones, like natural disasters. There was also a discussion around the diversification of humanitarian action and how to develop standards for increasingly specialized organizations. Several participants also emphasized that despite the challenges, there was a need for measurements and clear targets for humanitarian action, just like any other activity.

It was agreed that any work on effectiveness should build on, and identify linkages between existing initiatives, such as the Joint Standards Initiative and Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD).

It was also suggested that there was a need for the development of standards and guidelines for interactions with the private sector and other non-humanitarian responders. In some cases, existing standards were available but there was need to ensure they were better disseminated and understood by new actors as well as host governments. One issue raised by a participant was on how to balance risk, including fiduciary risk, when working with new actors and organizations. There were questions both around how to assess new organizations, but also how to balance risk in situations where the choice was between working through a potentially less credible organization or not getting access.

A few participants also noted the challenges with evaluations that were either not independent enough or only looked at inputs rather than what the actual impact was. There was a need for more independent evaluations that focused on the recipient side and the experiences of affected populations. There was also a call for more attention to monitoring of responses in real time and not just evaluating them post-facto. One participant suggested the need to review the OECD-DAC criteria, and to see where those criteria fell short particularly for affected populations.

### *Preparedness and resilience*

Several participants underlined the importance of having humanitarian and development assistance complement one another to build resilience of communities, particularly in vulnerability contexts. The work had to begin before a disaster struck and continue through the entire cycle of recovery. One participant cautioned against seeing humanitarian aid in isolation and not addressing the underlying causes of humanitarian need, as that was just putting off suffering to the future.

Particularly with chronic and cyclical patterns of disaster, it was also emphasized that making preparedness more operational at all levels would be a key element of effectiveness. However, there was concern that there was insufficient and even declining investment in preparedness and disaster risk reduction even though it was clear that upfront investments were more cost efficient. There was a need to look at the reasons and attitudes driving this underinvestment and make it a part of the effectiveness discussion.

### *Best practices, innovation and technology*

A number of participants maintained that a key aspect of the effectiveness agenda and of the World Humanitarian Summit would need to be around the exchange of good practices and concrete ideas for improving effective action particularly from affected countries. They saw a key role for OCHA in this respect.

A number of people also mentioned the importance of innovation in improving the effectiveness of the system. Under that theme, they emphasized that the pace of technological change and the emergence of new actors were having a profound impact on humanitarian response and there was a need to look at both the threats and opportunities from both. A related issue was the need to look at improving information flows and data collection, including financial tracking, to support better decision making, particularly by national governments. In this context a number of participants mentioned the Kenya Open Data Initiative as an important model.

### *Humanitarian versus development aid effectiveness*

While there were lessons to be learned from the (developmental) aid effectiveness agenda and the Paris, Accra and Busan principles, it was widely agreed that they could not be directly translated to the humanitarian field. It was suggested that it might be wise to exclude the word ‘aid’ and refer to ‘humanitarian effectiveness,’ to avoid confusion and allow thinking for a new approach. However, it was noted that the advantage of the INCAF Principles, New Deal etc. was that they did provide clear parameters to what was required for effectiveness. The development discourse had succeeded in putting the national governments at the center and a similar process might be useful in clarifying what some ideas, such as including the voice of affected people, really mean in practice.

### *Inclusivity in the World Humanitarian Summit process*

Participants also strongly endorsed the idea of the “four-way” conversation to be held through the WHS process (Member States, affected populations/civil society, humanitarian organizations and academics). The inclusiveness of the process would be critical in determining whether it was success. They cautioned however that the discussion should be strongly grounded in experiences and perspectives from the field. Therefore, as an immediate priority, it was necessary to engage in consultations with affected populations and with actors at all levels (local, national and regional) and to bring in more affected and fragile states to better understand their perspectives

on these issues. This also included opening communication channels to the private sector and other non-humanitarian actors. In terms of promoting the WHS process, one participant stressed that there was a need to have advocacy that made it clear what the goals and purpose of the Summit were, without prejudging the outcome.

## **NEXT STEPS**

1. Several participants noted the lack of a significant body of research on humanitarian effectiveness and called for further investigation in this area. OCHA will assess what studies and research it could undertake.
2. Reflecting the calls to ensure an inclusive process, OCHA will organize a series of consultations in the field with practitioners, affected populations and civil society on humanitarian effectiveness.
3. OCHA will also consider other consultations, including with national disaster management organizations or other key actors to identify other perspectives on effectiveness and start to identify opportunities for sharing best practices.

## Annex 1 – Elements of Effectiveness

One point that came out of the discussion was the consensus that humanitarian effectiveness could not be limited to just spending and fiscal accountability. Instead it had to be embedded in the overall economic, political and security context and had a strong operational aspect. Some of the elements that were identified as core issues that need to be considered as part of the effectiveness agenda are:

- **Performance** – Do humanitarian actors meet core expectations for their activities? Is humanitarian work done according to clear professional standards? What is the role of certification for humanitarian organizations?
  - *Professionalization*
  - *Certification*
- **Accountability** – Are there mechanisms and process set up to ensure that humanitarian action is accountable to affected populations, host governments, donors and other humanitarian organizations. Is humanitarian action transparent? Is there trust between humanitarians and other actors? Are there clear frameworks for analyzing and managing risk, but which still allow flexibility of action in difficult and complex circumstances?
  - *Transparency*
  - *Trust building*
  - *Risk management*
- **Coordination** – Is humanitarian action coordinated at all levels – between international and national actors, within national systems, and with local level actors? Do Governments have the capacity needed to lead coordination efforts in all appropriate situations?
  - *International*
  - *National*
  - *Local*
- **Contextualization** – Is the approach being used appropriate to the context? Do humanitarians have clearly defined methodologies and approaches to respond to different types of contexts?
  - *Natural disaster or hazard*
  - *Conflict*
  - *Vulnerability context*
- **Principles and Standards** – Is humanitarian action grounded in the core principles? Are there clear professional and technical standards for operationalizing those principles? Are there ethical frameworks to monitor adherence to principles?
  - *Core humanitarian principles*
  - *Common standards (SPHERE, HAP, etc.)*
  - *Ethical frameworks*
- **Relevance** – Are the aid and services provided appropriate to the context and the community? Was the aid delivered in a timely way when it was truly needed? Did it really suffice to relieve human suffering and reduce humanitarian needs?
  - *Timeliness*



- *Appropriateness*
  - *Adequacy*
- **Participation** – Is humanitarian action fully inclusive of all relevant groups? Is there clear ownership and leadership by governments and affected populations?
  - *Ownership by governments and affected populations*
  - *Inclusivity*
- **Capacity** – Do governments and international humanitarian actors have the systems and tools to deliver needed assistance? Are we fully utilizing local resources and capacities? Is there sufficient capacity to do strategic planning and coordination? What are the opportunities for technological advances?
  - *Systems and tools*
  - *Planning and coordination*
  - *Local resources*
  - *Technology*
- **Resilience and preparedness** – Are humanitarian organizations engaged before a crisis in building preparedness? Do humanitarian interventions also help to address root causes of vulnerability? Are humanitarians working in a coordinated way with development actors?
  - Resilience
  - Preparedness
  - DRR
  - Risk and Vulnerability Management
- **Innovation** – Are humanitarian actors exchanging best practices and identifying new opportunities to change the way they work? Is information flowing and being captured in a way that allows for improvement in the system? Is the humanitarian system adapting to the rapid transformations in society and technology?
  - Innovation to capitalize on opportunities in data, information and communication:
  - Innovation to support accountability challenges:
  - Innovation to promote partnership:
  - Innovation to better understand markets and market mechanisms:
  - Innovation to solve difficult operational obstacles
- **Access** – Are humanitarian actors able to reach people to provide help? Are there systems in place to ensure that those in need can access needed support?