

2012 Humanitarian Policy Forum

Summary Analysis Report

This Summary Analysis Report is intended to serve as a short report **presenting the key outcomes** of OCHA's 2012 Global Humanitarian Policy Forum. It also outlines how **OCHA will take forward the outcomes** of the Forum. A longer report with more detailed overview of presentations and discussions as well as transcript can be found in the Full Report available at <http://www.unocha.org/what-we-do/policy/events>.¹

BACKGROUND

On 13 and 14 December 2012, PDSB's Policy Analysis and Innovation Section organized the first Global Humanitarian Policy Forum in New York. The Forum included 70 participants, representing more than twenty countries.

The Forum built upon OCHA's 2011 Research and Policy Conference and was linked into the outcomes from two regional workshops OCHA hosted in 2012, one for Southern and Eastern Africa region, in South Africa and one for the Middle East and North Africa in Egypt. This year it aimed to:

- **be more diverse** ... *bring together a global group of policy thinkers to help broaden our analysis*
- **hear from national, new and unconventional voices** ...*including people working nationally and regionally on humanitarian policy challenges and people outside of the humanitarian policy sector*
- take the policy conversation to the next step and **identify priority policy areas** ... *and leave with a clearer understanding of the main policy and research gaps and how we can work together to address them*

The Forum's three sessions included: **The Big Picture**: where is the humanitarian thinking now? Where does it need to be?; **Opportunities and Innovations**; and **Making it Matter**: collaboration and initiatives for research and policy uptake.

¹ This report was prepared by OCHA incorporating material provided by the facilitation team from Beechwood International.

OVERVIEW OF SESSIONS AND SPEAKERS

The first session began with presentations from four women representing new voices and perspectives on humanitarian response. Underpinning the session was an attempt to **look at how thinking on ‘humanitarianism’ is shifting and how a 1991 humanitarian system needs to adjust to a 2015 world**. It included presentations by Sema Genel, the Founding member and Director of Support to Life (Hayata Destek), a Turkish non-governmental and independent humanitarian aid organization, Degan Ali, Executive Director of Adeso, Miwa Hirono, Deputy Director at the Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, School of Politics and International Relations, at the University of Nottingham and Marianna Olinger, researcher associated to Observatório das Metrópoles in Rio De Janeiro. The presentations covered the struggle for legitimacy of humanitarian NGOs in Turkey, the need to create an enabling environment for risk taking among humanitarian organizations in Somalia, how to build a new dialogue on humanitarian action with China, and the humanitarian impacts of urban gun violence in Brazil and Latin America. As part of these discussions, participants noted both the challenges of bringing together very different national and cultural perspectives on humanitarian response, but also the common struggles with legitimacy, scope of humanitarian responses, politicization of aid, and need for a humanitarian advocacy in key areas including building trust between humanitarian partners and accountability.

The second session featured a discussion around innovation and **how to bring more critical thinking and inventive approaches to the humanitarian sector**. It featured Salim Ismail, the founding Executive Director of Silicon Valley’s Singularity University on the opportunities for innovation provided by exponential advances in technology; David Paterson, the Chief Innovation Officer of World Vision Australia & New Zealand, who outlined a conceptual model for innovation around the need to find new points of leverage; Sarah Holewinski, the Executive Director of the Center for Civilians in Conflict on alternative approaches to working with military actors to ensure civilian protection in armed conflicts; Awssan Kamal from the Yemen Relief and Development Forum, on mobilizing diaspora for humanitarian action; and Kim Scriven, the Research & Innovations Officer for ALNAP and Chris Fabian, the Co-founder of UNICEF’s Innovation Unit on the challenges of bringing new approaches to humanitarian action to scale.

In the final session, participants worked in small groups to **identify priority policy questions and areas of inquiry that should be taken up** by OCHA and others in the coming years. The session culminated in a list of concrete proposals and initiative around key humanitarian policy areas, including individual commitments by participants.

KEY OUTCOMES: PRIORITY POLICY AREAS

Based on the discussions and inputs, participants identified the following areas of analysis and potential policy questions and solutions that OCHA and the humanitarian policy community should prioritize in the near term:

1. Reconceiving the humanitarian system

Those players recognized as part of the traditional 'humanitarian system' (e.g. IASC members, applied academics) clearly remain vitally important. However, other players not normally recognized as belonging to the traditional humanitarian structure are either taking on increasingly significant roles in meeting humanitarian need, or they have simply been meeting that need with limited recognition. Some are more obvious (e.g. militaries, private sector), while others are more informal and under-the-radar (e.g. diaspora community networks, new forms of local NGO). Not all subscribe to the same sets of principles, conventions, standards of quality, and codes of conduct. As these informal and 'non-traditional' humanitarian actors take on increasingly important and innovative roles, it requires a re-examination of just what the future "humanitarian system" will comprise. Addressing this issue is essential to improving the levels of understanding, synergy, collaboration and inter-operability going forward

- *Key policy questions and potential solutions:* Should we maintain the current understanding of the "humanitarian system", but just invite a wider range of players into the tent? Or is a new form of system/network needed altogether? Are there options in-between? How does racism impact humanitarian assistance and who has a voice? How can the new multi-polar humanitarian world become interoperable?

2. Scope of humanitarianism

The humanitarian sector is under constant pressure to expand the scope of its activities— not just horizontally (e.g. more locations and contexts), but vertically as well (e.g. pre- and post-emergency). It is natural to act to mitigate against potential crises through addressing vulnerability before and after a response. But as the scope of such activities expands into areas such as the resilience agenda our limited resources are being spread more thinly. The span of control is being stretched. New competencies are required. Overlaps with other sectors (e.g. development) increase, and questions about whether to address preparedness and root causes of need abound. Linked to these questions is the need for a deeper historical perspective. People from different cultures have practiced humanitarian assistance for centuries without the formal constructs of the international humanitarian system. Historical perspectives are important not simply in order for us to see how the system has evolved, but so that we can find alternative models that (1) may be useful, and (2) may, comparatively, reveal weaknesses in the models that are currently invisible to those within the system.

- *Key policy questions and potential solutions:* What activities can be considered "humanitarian" and how much responsibility do humanitarian actors have in building resilience and addressing root causes of need? How can historical notions of humanitarianism be used to better understand a future system? Should humanitarian action be re-categorized into distinct areas with different tools and systems to support them?

3. Risk-taking and accountability

There is a well-recognised tension in the humanitarian sector between risk-aversion and risk-taking, especially in relationships with institutional donors. Linked to attitudes to risk is often the question of whether actors have the ability to enact the accountability measures that were pledged, at all levels – towards the donor, other organizations, and most importantly, to local partners and the community. There is a call for greater transparency, and yet a tacitly-accepted

reticence to share failures in equal measure to successes. Here is where the sector could learn from other industries where failures must be recorded and learnt from due to consumer pressure and risk to public life. It was agreed that these two elements, when taken together, underpin most of our work across the world.

- *Key policy questions and potential solutions:* How can the tension between risk-taking/innovation and accountability, especially among donors, be resolved? Can a better incentive system for taking risks be built? How can we continue to promote vertical accountability but also build a culture of horizontal accountability where humanitarian partners are more transparent in sharing successes and failures (moving from accountability downwards/upwards to promoting accountability forwards)? Should there be a humanitarian ombudsman and if so, what would their remit be?

4. Proximity vs. remoteness

Over the years, various barriers have emerged – physical, structural and intellectual – between those who design and deliver aid and its intended recipients. Increased risk to aid worker security has led to various physical constraints in achieving a direct and regular interface with the local community in some contexts, while technological advances have helped widen the number of connected people, but created a simultaneous sense of disconnectedness. While it is certainly true that communities wish to receive higher quality assistance, they also have a fundamental desire to be engaged and better understood. As the process of aid delivery loses this proximity, it risks being perceived to be less ‘effective’.

- *Key policy questions and potential solutions:* How to understand and account for the multiple dimensions of “remoteness”? How to better balance between meaningful engagement on the ground and the capability (and sometimes necessity) to do remote management? What are the trade-offs between using remote tools such as social media versus face-to-face interaction? How will drone responses and cash transfers change the way humanitarians work?

5. Partnership vs. transactional relationships

The ever-growing number of ‘partnerships’ in the sector is currently not being paralleled by a deepening spirit of collaboration. This is the result of a number of reasons, including that funding, reporting and relationships run on the basis of a project timeline, rather than sustainable objectives, which ultimately leads to siloes, duplication of effort and ‘transactional’ relationships. The potential for these partnerships to foster long-term solutions or contribute to the prevention of further suffering is seriously limited. The current system also encourages negative competition among local actors, while there is little discussion around how to partner with other key stakeholders such as government actors from the local level to those at the center.

- *Key policy questions and potential solutions:* What do effective partnerships among diverse and unequal (in size, capacity or specialization) look like? How do we develop a functioning network that supports diversity? How do partnerships that are too layered, too segmented, unequal, or too short term work effectively? What is the common interface to bring these layers together?

6. Complexity

In response to the call for a greater appreciation for the sheer complexity of the issues in the humanitarian world, another theme was created to examine how and whether to change this discourse. There is a clear tension between the need to grapple with the intricacies of context and local knowledge, while also applying solutions that can be replicated across different contexts. The more we plan for, build, and manage participation/partnership, the harder it may be to "hear" people's voices. This is especially important given the resource constraints in the current climate.

- *Key research and policy questions:* How to get the humanitarian community to have more discourse on complexity? Is it possible to provide simple solutions without them being standard solutions? How can the humanitarian architecture become a self-organizing network that recognizes leadership on all levels rather than a top down system? How can aid workers be trained on critical cultural awareness to recognize their own biases?

NEXT STEPS

This Humanitarian Policy Forum was intended as a first step towards helping OCHA promote a more coordinated humanitarian policy agenda. Towards this end, the Forum culminated in an exercise to list concrete proposals and initiative that would support action on the identified areas of analysis.

Participant commitments

In order to help ensure a forward looking policy agenda that can impact global humanitarian action, increased collaboration is necessary. Taking this into account, participants brainstormed on potential areas of work and also made individual commitments. Some ideas and commitments from participants included:

- Facilitating the creation of joint research network between research entities and practitioners;
- Increasing the participation of scientists and the private sector in humanitarian policy conversations;
- Ensuring that research is done in a collaborative way, with shared methodology, with continuity;
- Pushing organizational change and critical cultural awareness training;
- Embed academics in target groups and humanitarian organizations to help facilitate the research agenda over long period of times;
- Look at how funding mechanisms can be applied more flexibly to support new collaborations and new ways of working;
- Work with southern researchers and civil society movements to explore the different ways to include affected people into the accountability system. Whilst the existing initiatives are great (HAP, SPHERE, etc.) the reality is that there is not enough incentive to comply. Let's explore how to relinquish power, in favor of affected people; and
- Consider the idea of developing a global 'guide' of what the international humanitarian system provides in terms of tools and services, as well as a section on the legal basis for

the current system – both as a way to make the system more transparent and also to promote a debate on which of those tools and services (some of which are very old) remain relevant and where the gaps are.

OCHA looking forward

In the coming years, OCHA will have more concrete opportunities to amplify the discussions that began in the Forum. OCHA intends to use the outcomes of the Forum in numerous ways:

1. Continue and broaden the conversation:

OCHA will make continued efforts to promote deeper and more diverse partnerships across the humanitarian policy community. Together the 2011 Research and Policy Conference, the Regional Workshops, and the 2012 Forum helped OCHA to serve as a convenor and connector to initiate common policy discussions and more importantly work to include new voices and promote a policy agenda that reflects a broader more global range of policy concerns. For 2013 OCHA intends to:

- Hold additional **Regional Policy Workshops and an annual Global Humanitarian Policy Forum** with more coordinated agenda's that build off of the 2012 Forum outcomes as well as link to other major humanitarian policy conferences held by outside constituencies;
- Continue to build and maintain a **network of global humanitarian policy thinkers** to help foster more global collaborate research, widen participation in policy conferences, etc.; and
- Continue its **Humanitarian Futures Grant Programme**, awarding grants to young researchers.

2. In-depth research:

In the 2011 conference, participants decided that more work was needed to understand how information can be used to ensure strategic decision making, particularly with respect to driving preventative action. In response, in 2012 OCHA convened a Policy Working Group (PWG) and, together with it, produced an in-depth analysis of the role of communications networks and social media in early warning, preparedness, and response. OCHA also compiled a set of humanitarian data and trends that will be built on every year. The report, Humanitarianism in the Network Age will be launched early next year. For 2013 OCHA intends to:

- Build **Policy Working Groups (PWG)** around key research topics and questions from the 6 areas of analysis; and
- **Commission and/or coordinate reports** based on some of the most important questions the 6 areas of analysis.

3. Uptake and policy:

OCHA strives to continually find ways to increase the use and uptake of research and policy in solving the humanitarian system's systemic challenges. In the coming years, OCHA has some concrete opportunities to take forward the thinking from the Forum in various fora and key events. For 2013 OCHA intends to:

- Bring outcomes of the Policy Forum into planning discussions of the intended **World Humanitarian Summit** planned for 2015/2016;
- Use the discussions from the Forum to inform OCHA's **Strategic Framework and corporate priorities for 2014-2017**; and
- Bring the issues and recommendations of the Forum to the attention of **Member States** and, potentially for consideration in the **General Assembly and ECOSOC**.

4. Communication and dialogue:

OCHA commits to remaining engaged with Forum participants through regular communications and dialogue. For 2013 OCHA intends to:

- Explore the possibility of developing a **shared web space** for future policy discussions with Forum participants;
- Widely **circulate this Summary Analysis Report as well as the Full Forum Report** and transcript to Forum participants. OCHA will also prepare and share a Synthesis Report from all Policy Workshops and Forums that dissects the key emerging issues; and
- Produce and disseminate a **quarterly Research Digest** of humanitarian research and policy initiatives and events and welcomes contributions from Forum participants.

Participants List

Name	Organisation
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Andrea Noyes	OCHA
Andrew Thow	OCHA
Antonio Donini	Feinstein International Famine Center
Ashley Jackson	ODI
Awssan Kamal	Yemen Relief and Development Forum
Christina Bennett	OCHA
Christo Coetzee	North-West University
Christopher Fabian	UNICEF Tech lab
Ciaran Donnelly	International Rescue Committee
Daniel Gilman	OCHA
Daniel Pfister	OCHA
Degan Ali	African Development Solutions
Dennis Dijkzeul	IFHV at Ruhr Universität Bochum
Derk Segaar	OCHA
Dirk Salomons	Columbia University
Feleke Tadele	Oxfam
Genevieve Boutin	UNICEF
Gregg Greenough	Harvard Humanitarian Initiative
Gwi Yeop-Son	OCHA
Hansjoerg Stroehmeyer	OCHA
Hugh MacLeman	AusAID (formerly Humanitarian Futures Programme)
Irwin Gabriel Lopez	Humanitarian Futures Grant Winner

Jean Claude Kazadi	SADC
Jeanine Cooper	OCHA Liaison Office to the African Union
Jeffrey Villaveces	OCHA Colombia
Jemilah Mahmood	Kings College HFP (Also, Founder of MERCY Malaysia)
Jeremie Labbe	International Peace Institute
John Crowley	Harvard Humanitarian Initiative
Juan Pablo O'Farrill	OCHA Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (Mexico)
Kaoruko Seki	OCHA
Katherine Haver	Humanitarian Outcomes
Kelly David	OCHA
Kim Scriven	ALNAP
Kimberly Deni	WFP
Kirsten Gelsdorf	OCHA
Larissa Fast	University of Notre Dame
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Rob Bailey	Chatham House
Salim Ismail	Singularity University
Sarah Holewinski	Center for Civilians in Conflict
Sema Genel	Support to Life
Shimeles Hailu	Humanitarian Futures Grant Winner
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Hameed Hakimi	Af-Pak/Facilitator
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Edwina Thompson	Facilitator