TRANSFORMING HUMANITARIAN ACTION

As humanitarian action evolves, OCHA has continued to contribute to the process with rigorous monitoring, evaluations and policy development.

Building humanitarian leadership

The leadership of UN RCs and HCs is crucial in saving and transforming lives in crises worldwide. On behalf of the IASC, OCHA continued to strengthen humanitarian leadership in the field. Through targeted talent scouting and talent management, the cadre of HCs is recognized for high performance and has become increasingly diverse. During 2020 the humanitarian system saw significant progress in diversity, particularly geographical diversity. Of the 16 newly designated HCs in 2020, eight (50 per cent) were women and nine (55 per cent) were from non-WEOG (Western European and other group) countries that were historically underrepresented. This brought the percentage of HCs from non-WEOG regions up from 41 per cent in early 2020 to 48 per cent by the year's end. The percentage of women rose from 37 to 42 per cent during 2020.

Building on the IASC's investments in strengthening leadership over the past decade, OCHA worked with the UN Development Coordination Office and the wider Secretariat to ensure greater coherence and strengthen leadership across the RC system. Improvements were made in RC selection processes, performance management and leadership development, and a new RC/HC Talent Pipeline is expected to transform the ability of the UN Sustainable Development Group and the IASC to ensure that strong humanitarian leadership is in place when and where needed.

The pandemic underscored the need for all 129 RCs to meet the required competencies and skills, including on humanitarian issues, allowing them to effectively coordinate international response to support Governments' efforts.

Evaluating response

OCHA's Evaluation and Oversight Section coordinated the completion of two major

A year after being affected by Cyclone Idai, Hortencia Abreu sheltered in a tent after rains destroyed her own tent in Mozambique in 2020. Her small crop production was also affected. Hortencia still depends on humanitarian aid to survive. Credit: OCHA/Saviano Abreu

Aid workers creating GBV awareness among displaced communities in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado Province. Credit: UN/Helvisney Cardoso

Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations (IAHEs) in 2020. The evaluations provide IASC partners and other stakeholders with critical insight and recommendations for improving the IASC's collective performance during major emergencies, and for advancing the integration of gender equality and the empowerment of women into humanitarian action.

Response to Cyclone Idai in Mozambique

The IAHE of Cyclone Idai in Mozambique was the first assessment of the Scale-Up activation mechanism. The IASC adopted this mechanism in 2018 to ensure the rapid and effective mobilization of system-wide capacities in response to major emergencies.

The evaluation found that immediate humanitarian needs were anticipated correctly and contributed to the successful response. This positive outcome was due to the Scale-Up activation, joint preparedness, strong collaboration with the Government and timely joint aerial assessments.

As intended, the Scale-Up activation helped to increase in-country capacities and mo-bilize human and financial resources in the early stages of the response. It also helped strengthen collective accountability to the affected people by ensuring their participation in rapid assessments and providing an inter-agency feedback-and-complaint mechanism.

A survey showed that the majority of affected people felt that humanitarian responders treated them with respect, and most people stated that the assistance was in line with their needs.

The IAHE also identifies opportunities to improve future collective responses in similar contexts. These include better use of anticipatory action triggers and cash-based interventions; greater engagement with local civil-society organizations and the private sector; and more coordinated management of monitoring and assessment data.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

The first evaluation to assess the progress of the IASC agenda on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (GEEWG)

since 2017 was the first thematic evaluation undertaken by the IAHE Steering Group, led by OCHA.

The independent evaluation team found that the IASC has made notable progress since 2017 in integrating GEEWG into its humanitarian responses, especially in protracted crises.

Several factors contributed to the inclusion of GEEWG into humanitarian responses. These included developing the IASC Gender Accountability Framework; cluster-level and agency-specific guidance on gender mainstreaming; greater availability of gender advisers through the Gender Standby Capacity Project and cluster-lead agency surge mechanisms; and increasing the application of the GAM.

Investments in the guidance, training and availability of GEEWG expertise helped humanitarian organizations to more systematically consult affected women and girls and increase the collection and reporting of sex- and age-disaggregated data.

The IAHE also captured best practices and provided recommendations to further mainstream GEEWG into humanitarian action.

The evaluation identified opportunities to improve future collective responses, such as more rapid deployments of gender experts in sudden-onset emergencies, more predictable gender capacities at the cluster and HCT levels, increasing funding for GEEWG programming, and improving coordination and accountability for mainstreaming GEEWG at the country and global levels.

Full reports can be accessed at unocha.org/themes/evaluations-and-reviews/reports

Better analysis to inform response

The enhanced HPC approach is the culmination of two years' work by OCHA and partners to ensure the HPC evolves and matures.

The HPC is a series of actions to analyse needs, and to prioritize, plan and coordinate response delivery during a crisis.

It focuses on how humanitarian crises impact people's lives, livelihoods and coping capacities by analysing the combined effects of shocks, stresses, vulnerabilities and capacities. The new approach pays specific attention to priorities identified by affected people themselves, and to particular vulnerabilities and diversities such as those linked to gender, age and disability.

The new intersectoral analysis method — the Joint Intersectoral Analysis Framework (JIAF) — also captures chronic and structural causes and emerging risks to better define immediate acute needs versus longer-term needs.

The IASC endorsed a first version of the JIAF in 2020, and the first formal application took place in the 2021 HNOs. Libya's 2021 HNO is a good example of the depth of analysis that can be achieved using the JIAF, even when working with limited data and constrained access environments compounded by COVID-19. The analysis of humanitarian needs and their severity was differentiated between five population groups with distinct needs. This analysis allowed the HRP to be formulated with more specific and prioritized strategic objectives directly linked to the HNO findings, which is a key objective of the enhanced approach to the HPC.

In Afghanistan, the OCHA country office and its partners carried out a robust analysis to identify potential risks and influences on the needs facing populations of concern throughout 2021. Plans in 2019 reflected the assumption that people would recover and move out of humanitarian need. How-

ever, a midyear review indicated this was unlikely, and subsequent planning focused on analysing the drivers of need, along with risks and opportunities, to define the most likely scenario. Humanitarians also engaged with development organizations to create a common needs analysis that puts humanitarian needs in the wider context of 'social assistance' needs in the country.

Decentralization

Decentralization is part of the Secretary-General's vision for reforming the UN, with the aim of making it a more agile, flexible and accountable organization that better serves people who rely on its activities worldwide.

For OCHA, this has been an opportunity to continue improving the quality of support that its headquarters functions provide to the field, strengthen capacity to manage its delegated authorities, and ensure that the organization remains financially sustainable.

The pandemic affected anticipated time frames for the decentralization process in 2020, but OCHA progressed with relocating specific activities from New York and Geneva to The Hague, Istanbul and regional offices.

Sixty-six posts, or around 16 per cent of all HQ-based posts, have been or are in the process of being relocated from Geneva and New York to The Hague, Istanbul and regional offices. During 2020 relocation to The Hague was effectively completed, and a host-country agreement with Turkey for presence in Istanbul was finalized by the year's end, enabling the completion of decentralization during 2021.

OCHA will continue to identify relocation opportunities within other functions where this will improve service to field operations, but it will maintain a strong footprint in Geneva, where OCHA's humanitarian leadership has been strengthened.

Learning from the pandemic

Participants at OCHA's annual Global Humanitarian Policy Forum discussed the political, socioeconomic and security implications of the pandemic and how they might transform humanitarian action.

Held in December 2020, the virtual two-day forum focused on the theme 'A Case for Transformation? The Longer-term Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic'. This was OCHA's ninth annual policy event, convened with the United Nations Foundation.

To enable broad participation, the forum's opening event was live-streamed on Twitter. It hosted over 1,000 participants from humanitarian and development communities, Governments, the private sector, non-profits, civil society and academia in more than 80 countries.

The forum concluded with these policy-related lessons learned from the pandemic:

- The humanitarian system cannot afford to repeat the collective failure in preparedness. Efforts to scale up preparedness must go hand-in-hand with building affected communities' resilience.

- It is time to invest in local front-line leadership, honour long-standing commitments to empower local organizations, and reframe humanitarian partnerships around responsibilities and comparative advantages.

- "Leading with equity" means taking a rights-based approach to humanitarian action, linking response to long-term programmes for vulnerable groups, and combating structural racism and discrimination in the humanitarian system.

- Technology can help to enable earlier, faster and potentially more effective humanitarian action. But these advantages come with complex challenges and risks, including unequal access to technology and connectivity, inadequate data protection and privacy, and the spread of

A returnee Venezuelan boy washes his hands during COVID-19 confinement in a temporary shelter in Venezuela. Credit: OCHA/Gema Cortes

misinformation and disinformation. Realizing the 'digital promise' requires using technologies in a way that is responsible, sustainable and inclusive, and protects human life and dignity.

- Building coalitions for success requires long-sighted, diplomatic efforts before a crisis, and agility, solidarity and coordination after it strikes. Cross-sector collaboration is not a choice — it is an indispensable building block.