

THE FOUR PILLARS OF HUMANITARIAN REFORM

The context in which the humanitarian community work is constantly evolving and becoming more challenging, with a sharp increase in the numbers of people moving both internally and across borders. Natural disasters have dominated the media alongside news pieces of communities heading towards famine and political instability as they fail to adapt quickly enough to changing environments. Thousands of organizations are active in disaster relief and humanitarian activities around the world. Some of them focus on a specific issue (e.g. *Action contre la Faim* is specialized in food security) while others are mandated to assist a specific type of beneficiaries (e.g. UNHCR focuses on refugees). Some have a global reach while others are only represented in a limited number of countries. Some are well resourced while others are struggling to finance their operations due to the voluntary nature of humanitarian funding. As a result, the capacity and resources available to respond to humanitarian needs varies greatly from one crisis to another, and people do not always get the minimum required to survive adverse conditions caused by conflicts and natural disasters.

To improve the consistency and quality of services they provide as a group, the key humanitarian organisations, (United Nations agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the non-governmental community) active in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (www.iasc.org), have embarked on a process of humanitarian reform. These efforts stem from a review of the response system, commissioned by the Emergency Relief Coordinator in 2005 as a response to the lack of a timely and effective response as seen with Sudan in 2004.

Humanitarian reform seeks to make funding more reliable and predictable to combat 'forgotten emergencies,' to strengthen country level coordination for the effective use of limited resources, and finally, to strengthen partnerships with NGOs, civil society, and other actors such as private sector and countries providing military assets who contribute to humanitarian response.

1. Strengthened coordination and predictable leadership: The Cluster Approach

A cluster (or working group) has been established to strengthen capacity in nine areas of work where critical gaps have been identified: water and sanitation, nutrition, health, emergency shelter, logistics, emergency telecommunications, camp coordination, early recovery and protection. These are expanding to include possibly, Education and Food. Various organizations have taken on the role of global leads, accountable for providing an effective inter-agency response within their particular area of responsibility. (See attached List).

For example, all humanitarian organisations with expertise and capacity in water and sanitation are expected to participate in the Watsan cluster led by UNICEF. Together, they must map out the overall capacity of the group, assess what additional capacity they are likely to need, and create standby arrangements to be in a position to deploy staff and equipment quickly at the onset of a disaster. In this context, the private sector, could, in principle, be called upon to make available Watsan engineers for a number of days each year through a partnership with one of the cluster members. As the cluster lead, UNICEF is the last resort provider, meaning that if no other cluster member has the capacity to provide the Watsan services required in a crisis situation, UNICEF is expected to do all it can to attend to the needs.

Partnerships can be a cost-effective way of addressing some of the gaps identified by clusters. For instance, the logistics cluster identified airfield congestion as a key challenge in large-scale disasters. DHL has agreed to donate services (personnel and assets) to help manage the surge of humanitarian cargo which too often in the past has created bottlenecks at airports. Two 80-person disaster response teams are on standby and ready to deploy in Asia or in the Americas.

2. Strengthening the Humanitarian Coordinators System: Preparing the Emergency Managers of the Future

The role of the Humanitarian Coordinator is pivotal to the success of a humanitarian operation. The reform agenda focuses on the skills and understanding required to ‘pull-together’ the humanitarian community in crises, be they from the United Nations, or from the NGO community. A pool of Humanitarian Coordinators has been established. Its most significant feature is the presence of seven non-UN members, who come from the NGO community. This is a radical step for the UN humanitarian system requiring a large shift in mindset. This year sees the deployment of the first NGO Humanitarian Coordinator to Uganda.

Humanitarian actors have the right to expect an effective and professional coordination capacity when they deploy to a new disaster area. As such this pillar of the reform is exploring different executive education programs to ensure that these future emergency managers are well-prepared to carry out their missions. The course will bring relevant business management practices into emergency management (evaluation tools, supply chain management planning etc).

3. Adequate, Flexible and Predictable Humanitarian Financing

Over the past few years, at least a third of the humanitarian requirements presented in Consolidated Humanitarian Appeals were unmet for lack of funding. How can one expect humanitarian actors to be accountable for providing shelter, health services or food without funding? One of the most important tools available to a Humanitarian Coordinator is the Central Emergency Relief Fund providing a minimum amount of flexible and predictable financing for the most urgent life-saving programs that are critically under-funded. The CERF can also be used immediately to provide quick initial funding for rapid response in sudden onset disasters or when an existing crisis rapidly deteriorates. Up to two-thirds of the grant facility can be allocated to rapid response with the additional one-third devoted to addressing under-funded emergencies.

Following the outbreak of fighting in Timor Leste in April and May 2006, when more than 135,000 people became homeless overnight, the US\$ 4 million from the CERF helped WFP ensure the minimum levels of food and provide supplementary rations to children and pregnant/breastfeeding women. In the initial stages of the response to the crisis in Lebanon, CERF support of US\$ 2.5 million to common logistics services helped the United Nations country team to expedite the transportation of humanitarian commodities from Syria into Lebanon, mobilize a significant trucking fleet from Beirut to transport food and supplies to conflict-affected communities, charter an aircraft for the delivery of vehicles and ensure an appropriate security structure to support all logistics operations.

Since its launch in March 2006, the CERF provided US\$ 77 million to humanitarian emergency situations that had not attracted sufficient donor attention. The largest allocation

was made to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where underfunded life-saving projects received US\$ 38 million in CERF grants. CERF funds already disbursed have helped accelerate the implementation of life-saving programmes including malaria control, cholera response, mine action activities and protection of IDPs.

At a conference in New York on 7 December 2006, public and private donors pledged US\$343 million to resource the grant facility for 2007. In addition, the CERF continues to serve as a loan mechanism with USD \$50 million available to make advances to UN agencies faced with cash-flow problems.

Finally, the UN Foundation, UNFIP and OCHA have concluded an agreement to allow private donors to make tax-deductible contributions to the CERF. Communications, advertising and marketing will be necessary to convince private donors that the CERF is helping humanitarian actors address needs that otherwise would be unattended. To this effect, OCHA is looking for companies with communications and marketing skills to communicate to a wider audience how the CERF is helping the UN to make a difference.

4. Building Partnerships: No single humanitarian agency can cover all humanitarian needs, collaboration is not an option, it is a necessity.

The number of natural disasters that provoke serious emergencies has rapidly increased in the last years. At the same time there are fewer 'new wars' but rather we see the festering of longstanding and 'forgotten crises.' Global wealth has increased, yet people die every day from hunger, poverty, and disasters. The media has turned a critical eye towards humanitarian response, bringing it more daily under the scrutiny of the public. The emergence of new humanitarian actors, such as the military and private companies, and the proliferation of NGOs mean that the humanitarian field has grown exponentially. Collaboration has become more and more challenging, and now there is an urgent need to develop better ways of working together.

In July 2006, 40 leaders of UN humanitarian organisations, NGOs, the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, the IOM and World Bank gathered in Geneva for the first meeting to explore ways of enhancing the effectiveness of humanitarian response. The group, now formally known as the Global Humanitarian Platform will, in the coming year, work to articulate principles of authentic and strategic partnership.

This final pillar of the reform agenda aims, quite simply, to get the right people around the table when taking decisions critical to humanitarian response. The traditional way of doing business is now over, NGOs, the Red Cross Movement and the UN must work hand in hand, with mutual respect, for there to be a sustainable difference in the lives of those in need.

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