

# SUMMARY DOCUMENT

## EVENT DETAILS

**On the 29th of October, DSAI held its annual conference. During the day, the Humanitarian Action Study Group held an online panel discussion on humanitarian response.**

The discussion brought together humanitarian actors and researchers from a range of contexts, reflecting on different dimensions of humanitarian policy, research and learning. Contributions considered key themes including resilience-building in protracted crises, designing and delivering more inclusive emergency responses, and strategies for managing counterterrorism risks.

We are grateful to the speakers for their contributions:

- **Conor O'Loughlin**, Country Representative and **Joseph Ho**, Head of Programs, Catholic Relief Services, Afghanistan;
- **Emma O'Leary**, Senior Humanitarian Policy Advisor, Norwegian Refugee Council; and
- **Jennifer Byrne**, University College Cork and NUI Galway.

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## BACKGROUND

Against a backdrop of growing humanitarian needs globally, and a greater concentration of needs in protracted crises in particular, the humanitarian system is facing calls to reform to be more sustainable and inclusive, and manage changing risks. The annual conference webinar featured presentations on a range of aspects of humanitarian policy, research and action. This summary synthesises some key discussion points.

## HUMANITARIAN RESILIENCE

Conor O'Loughlin and Joseph Ho opened the panel with evidence and learning from their humanitarian resilience-building programme in Afghanistan. The programme aims to address chronic vulnerability and build resilience through an integrated approach working at both the household and community levels. Interventions include that introduce low cost social behavior changes activities in crop and livestock management, and rangeland and watershed management. The importance of long-term investments, and multi-year funding was highlighted, with CRS' experience demonstrating that timelines of 3-5 years are required, pointing to ongoing challenges associated with the mismatch of needs and funding priorities.

## INCLUSIVE PROGRAMMING

Jennifer Byrne presented research carried out with Self-Help Africa in Uganda on the subject of inclusion of people with disabilities in emergency response, drawing attention to the frequent exclusion of people with disabilities from every stage of the disaster preparedness and response process. The presentation highlighted key issues including the importance of context-specific understandings of disability, challenges arising from a general lack of data and information on people with disabilities; and the value of a twin-track approach of both mainstreaming the inclusion of people with disabilities, alongside the provision of targeted programming.

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## RESOURCES

Catholic Relief Services, (2019), [\*\*Introducing Social Behavior Change to Agricultural Development.\*\*](#)

Norwegian Refugee Council (2020), [\*\*Toolkit for Principled Humanitarian Action: Managing Counterterrorism Risks.\*\*](#)

Humanity & Inclusion, CBM and International Disability Alliance (2019), [\*\*Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action.\*\*](#)

Humanity & Inclusion (2015), [\*\*Disability in Humanitarian Context: Views from Affected People and Field Organisations.\*\*](#)

DSAI's Humanitarian Action Study Group (2020) [\*\*Leveraging Research and Evidence for Humanitarian Response during COVID-19.\*\*](#)

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## MANAGING RISK

Emma O'Leary introduced Norwegian Council's new toolkit on managing counterterrorism risks, against a backdrop of a proliferation in recent years of cross-cutting counterterrorism-related measures at global, regional and national levels. The aim of the online toolkit is to raise awareness of counterterrorism risks, and help humanitarian responders to identify and mitigate these. The presentation highlighted the fact that risk is inherent in humanitarian action and can never be fully eliminated, something that is incompatible with the increasingly common 'zero risk' approach of some donors. The toolkit includes a review of counterterrorism measures and how they apply to humanitarian actors, an overview of counterterrorism clauses and partnership agreements, a practical guide to risk management frameworks, and further resources.

## AN UNPRECEDENTED CRISIS

In the discussion, panelists considered the impact of COVID-19, including how the crisis has dominated donor agendas and drawn attention away from longer-term and wider programming needs; the implications for humanitarian operations and business continuity while ensuring the health and safety of staff and partners; and the risk of losing ground on important agendas such as disability inclusion which may otherwise have seen greater advancements. The impact on localisation was a particular focus, reflecting how early hopes that the crisis might catalyse greater localisation and redistribution of power have not been fully realised.

The discussion closed with reflections on what issues might be top of the humanitarian agenda in a year's time. Panelists emphasised inclusive and participatory programme planning, design and delivery; the potential of Ireland's upcoming seat on the UN Security Council as an opportunity for a strong voice on principled humanitarian action; and a greater focus on the complex nature of needs in crises pushing responders out of siloed approaches.