

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

EVENT DETAILS

On the 29th of October, DSAI held its annual conference. As part of the day's discussions, the Humanitarian Action Study Group held an online roundtable discussion on COVID-19 response.

The discussion brought together humanitarian and development actors, reflecting on different dimensions of COVID-19 response. Contributions considered the specific programming adaptations made, documentation and forecasting of secondary impacts of the crisis, and reflections on its implications for the humanitarian system and financing more widely.

We are grateful to the speakers for their contributions:

- **Niamh Caffrey**, Health Project Officer, Mísean Cara;
- **Maurice Sadlier**, Programmes Director, World Vision Ireland; and
- **Luca Peciarolo**, Senior Advisor, Humanitarian Financing, Norwegian Refugee Council.

For more information and updates on DSAI events, and to become a member, please visit dsaireland.org.

BACKGROUND

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic presents an unprecedented global health crisis with profound implications for humanitarian needs, response and the humanitarian system more widely. Since May 2020, the Humanitarian Action Study Group has sought to convene discussions to reflect on its implications and how the humanitarian research and practice communities can support effective, sustainable and coherent response. The annual conference webinar sought to build on these discussions, and brought together speakers considering the crisis' implications for programming, secondary impacts, and the wider humanitarian system. This summary synthesises some key discussion points.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Niamh Caffrey presented on Mísean Cara's approach to COVID-19 response, emphasising key features of the faith-based organisation's programming that include long-term commitment, relationship-building and community trust. These components of the approach were highlighted as critical for effective real-time, response in communities affected by COVID-19, and the vital work of dispelling myths and misinformation about the virus.

SECONDARY IMPACTS

Maurice Sadlier presented on World Vision's research assessing the secondary, 'aftershock' effects of the pandemic, drawing in part on modelling of the impacts of the Ebola crisis in West Africa, and highlighting in particular, the risks to children. Key risks included detrimental effects on health beyond the pandemic alone due to reduced vaccinations; increased risk of violence against children, poverty and hunger; and interrupted or blocked return to education, particularly for girls. In the face of these longer-term impacts, the importance of retaining a long-term perspective, and programming, even in the midst of crisis response, was highlighted.

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

RESOURCES

World Vision (2020) *Aftershocks* series of publications, [**Deadly Waves, A Perfect Storm, Out of Time,**](#) and [**Secondary Impacts.**](#)

Norwegian Refugee Council (2020) [**Make or Break: The Implications of COVID-19 for Crisis Financing.**](#)

Misean Cara (2020) [**COVID-19 Updates.**](#)

Pádraig Carmody, Gerard McCann, Clodagh Colleran and Ciara O'Halloran (Eds.), [**COVID-19 in the Global South: Impacts and Responses.**](#)

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

For more information and updates on DSAI events, and to become a member, please visit dsaireland.org.

HUMANITARIAN FINANCING

Turning to the implications of the crisis for the wider humanitarian system, Luca Peciarolo presented research by the Norwegian Refugee Council on the pandemic's impact on crisis financing. Synthesising key lessons learned, the research highlights key successes in the rapid mobilisation of funds; effective leverage of pre-primed funds such as pooled funds; efficacy of flexible, high-quality funding in responses; and the value of earlier investments in relationships and systems to facilitate effective response. Challenges and obstacles that were highlighted included systemic issues in dealing with peaks in demand; a tendency for the system to default to familiar funding channels, such as through the UN; and very limited engagement with and funding of national and local organisations.

LOOKING AHEAD...

In the discussion section, panelists considered whether the COVID-19 crisis was likely to facilitate key advances in the humanitarian system and responses, or whether it was likely to undermine and undo progress in key areas such as accountability transparency and localisation. The importance of learning and adapting programming was highlighted, against a backdrop of increased costs and timelines for delivery. At the same time, speakers drew attention to worrisome trends in the politicisation of aid and the importance of effectively communicating the impact of principled aid and response to the general public and political leaders in this context.

Considering rapidly changing context, the discussion closed with panelists' reflections on what they think will be top of the humanitarian agenda in six months' time. Speakers jointly highlighted the economic impacts and secondary effects; the emphasis that will be placed on innovative responses; a possible focus on vaccine acceptability and delivery in humanitarian contexts; and a hoped-for, wider recognition of the limitations of the humanitarian system and urgent need for reform in light of lessons from the pandemic.