

Phase II – Theme IV: New Generation of Disasters, Innovation and Change

Introduction

This guidance document focuses on the third of the four themes identified by the Irish Consultative Process: ‘New Generation of Disasters, Innovation and Change’. It should be read in conjunction with the ‘Overview of Phase II – Irish Consultative Process to the WHS’ document. It summarises the key findings from Phase I of the Irish Process plus the update on thematic work by the global WHS process to date. It also suggests key questions developed from the work already conducted (at both an Irish and global level) which will be used to guide further study in Phase II.

Background to Theme Area

As disasters increase in scale, nature and frequency, the international humanitarian system must likewise adapt. Innovation in humanitarian programming ought to be enhanced. Despite tremendous change in the humanitarian sector over the past decades, the international humanitarian system is seen as outdated, not keeping pace with the rapidly changing humanitarian landscape (e.g. dramatic increase in urban responses, and the growing capacity of local and national actors, and role of private sector and the military). There has been growth in the number of new partners with capacity, expertise and resources for humanitarian action. Yet, the international system’s response model is based on the premise that international response is the first line of response with little regard for domestic and regional capacities. There is growing rhetoric that one size should no longer fit all, but the discipline to put this into practice remains elusive (setting clear limits to its engagement, modifying its foot print, and reducing moral hazard and dependency).

There is a need to re-calibrate the international humanitarian system to changing realities: adopting different approaches for different types of emergencies; focusing more where it is ‘mission critical’; ensuring appropriate standards and principles are in place; and stimulating the increased engagement of different actors, in particular local responders and the private sector.

Another core requirement is tackling the growing finance gap. It requires diversifying the humanitarian finance base; channelling funding directly to actors best placed to provide assistance; minimising the extent to which humanitarian assistance is being used to address predictable and recurrent shocks; investing more in preparedness; improving the allocation of resources; minimising blocks to finance that affect humanitarian agencies’ ability to operate; and having greater capacity to assess the state and distribution of humanitarian finance, as well as transparency of finance flows and value for money.

Refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), whether displaced by conflict or natural disaster, are increasingly drawn to urban areas, where there may get better access to housing, basic services, education, markets and livelihood opportunities. Today, half of the world’s estimated 16.7 million refugees and at least 33.3 million IDPs are thought to live in urban areas. Current trends point to increasing conflict and disasters in cities that already have challenges in delivering basic services, security, and welfare. The humanitarian system is currently not configured to address the complexity of operating in these environments.

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Humanitarian actors are constantly adapting to the difficult and diverse contexts in which they work. Despite enthusiasm for small scale investment in piloting new innovations, there appears broad failure in the humanitarian sector’s ability to scale up successful ideas. Even when they do, it takes an unnecessarily long time. Validating ideas through individual pilots is not enough. Moderation and standard setting are needed to help compare different innovations and decide which solutions should be taken to scale. Innovation is repeatedly mistaken as being solely associated with technology, rather than a rigorous problem solving process.

Innovation will not arise spontaneously. The Summit can bring about a major drive and commitment to humanitarian innovation: demonstrating the returns on investment; generating the right environment (leadership, structures, incentives and resources) for the humanitarian community to adapt with the required speed and efficiency; identifying the next set of problems to be tackled; and proposing mechanisms for long-term finance and engagement.

Findings from Phase I of the Irish Consultative Process and the Global WHS Working Groups

The five stakeholders groups involved in the Irish Consultative Process are: Public Sector Group (PG); Private Sector Group (PvS); NGO Group (NGO); Diaspora Group (DG); and Education Group (EG). The Phase I consultations in Ireland and the Global WHS working groups yielded the following proposals concerning New Generation of Disasters, Innovation and Change:

- There is a need for common proposal and reporting requirements across donors (NGOs; DG);
- There is a need to streamline financial mechanisms through pooled funding and consortia (NGOs & PG)
- There is a need for more predictable leadership within the humanitarian system (PG & NGOs)
- There is a need for further consistency and continuity of funding (NGOs);
- Budgets should be consolidated for longer-term resilience funding (NGOs);
- It is important to improve digital data collection and standardisation of data gathering to enhance needs assessments and other assessments (collaboration with ICT sector is required) (DG, NGO, PG & EG)
- Scaling up of cash transfer programmes is needed (NGOs);
- Communication with target populations ought to be further promoted (DG, NGOs);
- Fora for scaling up innovation in humanitarian action ought to be established (PvS; NGOs);
- There is a need to link humanitarian/DRR financing with longer-term development financing (PG & NGOs);
- The evidence base for the cost effectiveness of particular aspects of humanitarian action (DRR over response; the relevance of humanitarian action to development gains) ought to be increased (PG);
- Urban risk ought to be addressed through further support to municipalities and civil society (see Resilience and Disaster Risk Reduction above) (PG);
- Methodologies for anticipatory responses ought to be further developed (PG);

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- Funding innovation and research for new technologies to enhance risk management (NGOs & EG);
- Coordination and division of labour of humanitarian actors according to comparative advantage and national/thematic interest (NGOs, PG);
- The strengths of the private sector, including in data management, ought to be better harnessed (DG, NGOs, EG);
- There is a need to implement better surveillance systems, early warning systems and thresholds for action in urban areas (EG).
- Determine the requirements for scaling up cash-based assistance;
- Explore mechanisms to stimulate the role of the local private sector and make sure it recovers immediately after a crisis;
- Examine how the international humanitarian system should adapt its business model in different types and scales of crises (natural disasters, conflicts, pandemics, etc.), in different settings and with different partners;
- Develop proposals on how financing needs to change to reduce the growing finance gap, and supporting a more agile and calibrated humanitarian system;
- Identify changes necessary to address increased risk of urban crises: 1) new tools, approaches and coordination mechanisms; 2) new cadre of urban experts and new partnerships; 3) prioritise and scale up urban resilience initiatives in high risk cities;
- Assess opportunities for amending counter-terrorism regulations where they have a negative impact on humanitarian finance;
- Propose models for facilitating joined up thinking, collaboration and partnerships across diverse actors to tackle humanitarian challenges;
- Scale up innovation through a package of measures, including: 1) evidence on the returns on investment; 2) best practice models for engagement; 3) identification of priority set of problems to be tackled, and 4) mechanism for long term investment.

Suggested Guidance Questions for the Focus Group Discussion meeting:

A paragraph¹ will be prepared on each suggestion bulleted indicating the ‘problem/ issue’ under review as identified in phase 1 and the WHS documentation. Then the focus groups will be asked the following questions:

- What needs to be done to address the issue/ problem?
- What should Ireland’s position be on this issue?
- What can the different stakeholders in Ireland do to address the issue? (public sector/ private sector/ NGOs/ diaspora/ education)
- Are there examples of how this issue has been addressed that can be documented as models/ case studies?

¹ These paragraphs will be developed in the coming days and may result in slight changes/ the merging of some of the above suggested bullet points.