Content for this topic: Understanding Humanitarian Financing to Improve NGO Access to Funding was informed through a combination of contributions from individuals and desk research.

In anticipation of the first webinar on humanitarian financing in September 2016 jointly organized by ICVA and PHAP, this interview with Melissa Pitotti, Head of Policy at ICVA, shares her views on the current state of humanitarian financing and the main challenges affecting NGO access to funding in light of the increasing gap between resources and needs and recent discussions in the context of the World Humanitarian Summit. This interview was first published on PHAP’s website.

EXPERT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Melissa, why is it important for NGOs to have an understanding of the overall humanitarian financing system and trends?

“At ICVA’s annual conference in 2013, we asked our network of humanitarian NGOs which topics they wanted to focus on in the coming year. We were surprised that the vast majority spontaneously converged around one issue: how do we more effectively resource principled humanitarian action? Nearly all our members are struggling to secure adequate, predictable and sustainable funding for their important work. As humanitarian needs outpace the availability of humanitarian resources, members want to help each other navigate a complex humanitarian financing system. Understanding is crucial to meeting the needs.”

What do you see as the main challenges that NGOs face when trying to access information relating to humanitarian funding?

“NGOs are struggling to navigate an increasingly bureaucratic landscape. Compliance requirements are tightening and vary across institutions. When we conducted an analysis for the NGO-driven Less Paper More Aid initiative and our UN Partnership Agreement Comparison, it was very difficult to access up-to-date explanations of procedures. This is a big challenge, particularly for frontline responders. NGOs are at the frontline of delivering response, and they should be better supported.”

In the context of the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), there have increasingly been references to “Investing in Humanity” – has anything come of this and is it relevant for NGOs to keep up to date on?

“The element of the Summit that got the most attention was the "Grand Bargain" on efficiencies in humanitarian financing. In addition, much attention was given to the Secretary General’s calls
to double the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to $1 billion and essentially triple the Country-Based Pooled Funds. The Secretary General’s report on the outcomes of the WHS also draws attention to Islamic finance initiatives, the forthcoming World Bank Global Crisis Response Platform, and the Education Cannot Wait Fund. It is relevant for NGOs to stay abreast of various developments underway, particularly as we advocate for better NGO access to the variety of funding channels that exist. However, NGOs should know that we still have not collectively resolved the fundamental issue of the significant funding gap that remains.”

The Grand Bargain – the package of reforms to humanitarian funding launched at the WHS – aims to address the humanitarian funding crisis – how do you think this might improve the funding conditions for implementing organizations?

ICVA and its membership has played a role in the Grand Bargain process. Other NGOs and the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement have joined us in calling for the humanitarian system to move away from a centralized, command and control, one-system-fits-all approach to an ecosystem of diverse actors, where frontline responders receive adequate and timely resources. The Grand Bargain has kick-started a process that could potentially help implementers by simplifying their reporting requirements, sharing partner capacity assessments, harmonizing agreements with partners, improving transparency in aid flows, and better supporting national and local actors. Many of our members are also excited about commitments made to cash and multi-year funding.

You will be one of the co-hosts of the upcoming online learning stream on humanitarian financing for NGOs, organized by ICVA and PHAP – is there anything in particular you look forward to hear about from the guest speakers?

We hope participants will conclude the humanitarian finance learning stream with a clearer understanding of the humanitarian financing landscape and some practical tips to better navigate the system. ICVA believes in the power of bringing partners together around a common set of challenges, so we would be delighted to see this learning stream sparking further exchanges of ideas between participants.

On 15 September 2016, Melissa Pitotti was one of the co-hosts for the first online session in this series, featuring experts from the OECD, Development Initiatives, and World Vision. This introductory session explored the overall humanitarian financing structure, focusing on the main challenges and opportunities NGOs face in accessing humanitarian funding.