Changing People’s Lives: From Delivering Aid to Ending Need
NGO brief for the High Level Leaders’ Round Table

This brief is intended to inform discussions with stakeholders leading up to, and during the High Level Leaders’ Roundtable (HLRT) ‘Changing People’s Lives: From Delivering Aid to Ending Need’. Led by ACTED, with inputs from World Vision International (WVI) and Christian Aid, coordinated by ICVA and shared widely amongst ICVA’s membership, this brief is based on a foundation of collective NGO experience and analysis.

Context

Over the past decade, the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance has risen from 40 million, to an estimated 114 million people. Further, between 2004 and 2015, annual inter-agency humanitarian appeals have grown by approximately 600 per cent, from US$3.4 billion, to US$19.44 billion. However, the gap between what is requested and what is received - has also grown, from $3.3 billion in 2011 to $7.2 billion in 2014. In parallel, the length of humanitarian responses over time has also increased with a shift from shorter-term needs to protracted crisis contexts. The increasing concentration of poverty in fragile states will result in rising humanitarian needs in the coming years.

As noted in the report of the UN Secretary General to the WHS, humanitarian action must not only strive to address the immediacy of disasters, but also ensure it contributes to addressing the root causes of crises and fragility. Realizing this shift is essential to integrate the increasing complexity and risk of humanitarian contexts and to cope with the overstretching of the humanitarian sector. Existing silos between humanitarian and development action must be overcome, whilst respecting humanitarian space and principled humanitarian action.

Key NGO messages for this High Level Leaders’ Roundtable

In relation to the Core commitments listed below, NGOs stress the importance of the following key messages for action by Member States, the UN, NGOs themselves and all actors engaged in humanitarian action.

Anticipate, Do Not Wait: to invest in risk analysis and to incentivize early action in order to minimize the impact and frequency of known risks and hazards on people.

1. The most effective way to reduce humanitarian need is to prevent or rapidly resolve crises before they take their toll on local populations. As such, NGOs call on states and multilateral actors to exercise their political will and use all available tools including the UN Security Council and regional governmental organizations to prevent and find peaceful solutions to conflict situations as early as possible.

2. Regular and coordinated data collection and analysis, addressing risks and vulnerabilities, is required to identify emerging crises and support prevention and early action. Furthermore, maintaining a common understanding of risks, vulnerabilities, capacities and priority needs in risk-prone contexts can improve the coherence and effectiveness of responses, whilst enabling root causes of conflict to be understood and addressed. Predictable and regular financial resources are required to create and sustain such a global risk monitoring framework.

Reinforce, Do Not Replace: to support and invest in local, national and regional leadership, capacity strengthening and response systems, avoiding duplicative international mechanisms wherever possible.

3. A power shift within the humanitarian system is needed. NGOs call for a decentralized humanitarian system, ensuring stronger participation of local and national organizations in humanitarian policy and decision making fora, such as Humanitarian Country Teams. Effective and principled humanitarian action can be better realized through an ecosystem of diverse local, national and international organizations.

1 OCHA (2016) Leaving no-one behind: Humanitarian effectiveness in the age of the sustainable development goals.
operating according to the principle of complementarity, taking decisions and actions at appropriate levels together with affected populations.

4. **It is critical for humanitarian action to be based on a sound understanding of local and national dynamics, capacities and vulnerabilities, with the participation of local and national stakeholders.** This can be promoted by moving beyond sector silos and one-system-fits-all methodologies, through **contextually driven approaches** and through planning and implementing responses on a geographic basis. These approaches will enable contextualized responses to leverage the diversity of **local and national actors**, including civil society, private sector and institutional stakeholders and is necessary to **support existing national systems**, rather than creating parallel structures.

5. NGOs welcome the call to invest in local capacity. However, capacity building should be driven by local and national organizations and institutions - not by international actors. **Local and national organizations and institutions should be driving their own development.**

6. The empowerment of local actors, who are often the first responders, must include efforts to **improve local and national NGOs’ access to funding opportunities** through better information sharing on funding sources, capacity support to access donor funding, whilst advocating to ensure counter-terrorism measures to not hinder access to funding for principled humanitarian action. If the benefits of the Grand Bargain are to be achieved, UN agencies must pass the greater flexibility in donor funding to local, national and international NGOs.

**Preserve and retain emergency capacity:** to deliver predictable and flexible urgent and life-saving assistance and protection in accordance with humanitarian principles.

7.** Parallel to reinforcing local and national capacities, NGOs call to retain international operational response capacities in certain contexts and large scale emergencies and crises.** International humanitarian actors need to retain their response capacity to deploy rapidly in times of crises. This deployment must occur without undermining local and national response systems and without creating parallel structures.

**Transcend Humanitarian-Development Divides:** Work together, toward collective outcomes that ensure humanitarian needs are met, while at the same time reducing risk and vulnerability over multiple years and based on the comparative advantage of a diverse range of actors. The primacy of humanitarian principles will continue to underpin humanitarian action.

8. Humanitarian and development actors must **move beyond traditional silos created by mandates and financial structures**, working in strategic partnerships and frameworks as appropriate, **without undermining principled humanitarian action.** Recognizing the protracted nature of crises, this requires **predictable multi-year funding** for holistic, multi-sector and multi-actor approaches tailored to the specific context. This will enable humanitarian programming to address longer term resilience oriented solutions, rather than solely short-term, reactive humanitarian interventions.

9. The potential benefits of financial and political investment in **crisis preparedness and risk reduction** have been extensively documented. Despite this, investment in better risk analysis, early warning and early action remains a low priority for donors. **NGOs are calling for longer term humanitarian funding to allow the necessary resources and time to build resilience and reduce vulnerability, and to increase funding for disaster and crises preparedness and risk reduction funding.**

**Commit to enable coherent financing that avoids fragmentation by supporting collective outcomes over multiple years supporting those with demonstrated comparative advantage to deliver in context.**

10. Better coordination of humanitarian and development agendas is clearly required. However, the most appropriate coordination, funding and planning mechanisms to achieve this, remains unclear.