Natural Disasters and Climate Change
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) ‘Natural Disasters and Climate Change’. Led by Christian Aid and ACTED, with support from CARE, Oxfam and PIANGO, coordinated by ICVA and shared widely amongst ICVA’s membership, this brief is the result of collective analysis by NGOs heavily engaged in natural disasters and climate change.

Context

Action that addresses the interlinked challenges of disaster risk, sustainable development and climate change is a core priority. Approximately 90% of recorded major disasters caused by natural hazards from 1995 to 2015 were linked to climate and weather including floods, storms, heatwaves and droughts. The costs related to natural disasters and climate change bring human, economic and environmental impacts. Since the first Climate Change Conference in 1995, over 600,000 lives have been lost and over 4 billion people have been injured, left homeless or in need of emergency assistance as a result of weather-related disasters. UNISDR estimates that economic losses from weather-related disasters – including earthquakes and tsunamis – is between US$250 billion and US$300 billion annually. This HLRT must result in bold commitments to action from all representatives of the humanitarian sector.

Key NGO messages for this High Level Leaders’ Roundtable

In relation to 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.

Core Commitment 1: Commit to accelerate the reduction of disaster and climate-related risks through the coherent implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, as well as other relevant strategies and programs of action, including the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway.

1. Limiting global warming and the associated climate change impacts as much as possible is crucial. The Paris Agreement’s legally-binding obligation to “holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change” must be matched with enhanced ambition by all countries and institutions, in particular the richer ones with higher carbon footprints, in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This requires a rapid shift away from the use of and investments in fossil fuels to sustainable forms of renewable energy.

2. NGOs call for the implementation of innovative funding sources which to generate truly additional resources for climate and sustainable development purposes. The Report of the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Finance, for example, included the consideration of using revenues from a Financial Transaction Tax and a solidarity on air tickets. In other circumstances, such as the UNFCCC loss and damage discussions, additional proposals were made, such as a fossil fuel extraction levy. However, despite the clear gap in available resources, these instruments have not received adequate attention, and the WHS should conclude with a clear goal to pursue the future implementation of new instruments.

3. There is an incontrovertible case for increased investment in preparing for emergencies and reducing the risk of disasters. Evidence shows that investing before disasters happen to get communities ready to cope with disasters is much more cost-effective than waiting for disasters to happen. Every USD$1 spent on preparedness saves more than $4 in disaster response; yet disaster risk reduction remains a low priority. NGOs are calling on aid donors and national governments to invest more financial resources in preparedness at local level. NGOs are proposing a target that the proportion of Official Development Assistance devoted to resilience should rise beyond the unambitious 1% sought by the SG.

Core Commitment 2: Commit to reinforce national and local leadership and capacities in managing disaster and climate-related risks through strengthened preparedness and predictable response and recovery arrangements.
NGOs support calls for the humanitarian and development sectors to work in a more integrated way, to ensure a coherent approach to reducing disaster risk, preparing for climate change impacts and building resilience including through tackling underlying drivers of disaster risk and vulnerability, within development frameworks and as part of response programmes. This requires including multi-risk analysis within development planning and more integrated approaches to addressing development and humanitarian needs in parallel; as well as a common understanding of risks, vulnerabilities and capacities across development and humanitarian actors. NGOs are calling for longer term humanitarian funding to allow the necessary resources and time to build resilience and reduce vulnerability.

NGOs call on the United Nations and Member States to work in partnership with NGOs to increase complementarity between humanitarian and development actors, but without undermining principled humanitarian action. Whilst the short-term impact of humanitarian action remains critically important to respond to urgent needs, the UNSG’s call to overcome traditional silos is ever more urgent. 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.

Insufficient attention is given to slow-onset natural hazards – i.e. drought – in the SG’s report. The humanitarian system is better set-up for fast onset crises, but ill-equipped to respond to drought. Often, governments do not wish to declare a disaster for political reasons. Funding is barely available to enable early action. El Nino is an outstanding example of this problem.

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NGOs note the growing interest in climate risk insurance, through initiatives such as the African Risk Capacity and the G7 Climate Risk Insurance Initiative. Whilst insurance products may offer some potential to transfer risk, they are not a magic bullet solution. Climate risk insurance must be able to demonstrate its value for money through robust evidence of the benefits it can deliver to those segments of the populations and communities who are most vulnerable – and the same or better returns on investment as DRR – before it is scaled up with scarce climate finance resources. To motivate a circle of greater resilience lowering insurance premiums, insurance can only work as part of a coherent resilience-building process, alongside investments and additional support for active adaptation measures. Care must be taken to ensure that poorer, more vulnerable people are not regressively penalized with larger insurance premiums, as they would be in a purely market-based approach. Those deemed uninsurable – the most vulnerable – must be at the heart of broader resilience-building measures.

NGOs are calling for the strengthening of national and local preparedness and response capacities and the provision of adequate and timely resources to frontline national responders rather than putting in place parallel structures that undermine them. NGOs welcome the UNSG’s call for the humanitarian system to “reinforce, not replace national and local systems” - and his call for “concrete targets to immediately increase direct funding to local partners, combined with long-term support to develop their capacity”. Whilst recognizing that international operational response capacities remain essential in some contexts, concrete action is required to enable a more prominent role for local and national NGOs, backed up with meaningful change to existing funding mechanisms, including those managed by the United Nations. Further, whilst disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation has been recognized as critical for reducing losses, this recognition is currently not matched with the commitments to resource it.
Core Commitment 5: Commit to ensure regional and global humanitarian assistance for natural disasters complements national and local efforts.

10. We need to encourage scalable systems whereby existing national systems expand to cover new needs, rather than promoting a parallel humanitarian system which is inefficient and costly. For particularly vulnerable countries, natural hazards need to be treated as an integral part of the context, especially as climate change takes hold. Many countries have linear growth strategies – assuming that economic growth will rise in a linear fashion – whereas they should be cyclical, planning for periodic impacts of natural hazards. Development plans should therefore address development, DRR, response and recovery priorities. National governments should commit to national social protection floors, and to incorporating natural hazard risk into their national growth strategies, with DRR as a core government strategy.

11. The UNSG calls for collective outcomes and empowered leadership. The detail of exactly how this would play out in practice is unclear. Whilst a great deal of the UNSG’s Agenda for Humanity is to be applauded, the area of the UNSG’s vision that NGOs feel most uncomfortable with is its centralized, command-and-control, one-system-fits-all, UN-centric approach. NGOs call for a decentralised global humanitarian system. Effective and principled humanitarian action can be better realized through an ecosystem of diverse local, national and international organizations operating according to the principle of complementarity, taking decisions and actions at appropriate levels together with affected populations.

12. NGOs are calling on donors to build on alternative approaches to ensuring accountability, based on informed management of risk, such as those used in the DRC and Somalia OCHA-led country based pooled funds. Whilst we recognize that donors face hard constraints in their own staff capacity and external accountability requirements, it is vital that donor due diligence procedures are proportionate to the size, length and complexity of the specific grant and do not act as a barrier for local and national engagement. The SG rightly calls for more funding for humanitarian crisis, but proposes a key vehicle for this to be a massive increase in the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). The CERF all goes to UN agencies, which already control more than half all available humanitarian funding. Channeling more funding to the UN through the CERF does not speak well to the need to better fund local actors. NGOs urge for donors to channel additional funds through mechanisms that better cohere with the ‘reinforce not replace’ agenda.

13. NGOs are calling on donors to publicize funding opportunities where NNGOs will see them - allowing reasonable time-frames to allow NNGOs a fair chance to apply; translating documentation into appropriate working languages; and allowing flexibility in minimum grant sizes for NNGOs.

14. If the benefits of the Grand Bargain are to be achieved, UN agencies must pass the greater flexibility in donor funding to national and international NGOs who they contract to deliver assistance.

15. The Charter for Change: As a strong signal of support to the UNSG’s agenda to “reinforce not replace national and local systems”, 23 INGOs have signed and well over 100 NNGOs have endorsed the Charter for Change - www.charter4change.org – in which INGOs make 8 concrete pledges to strengthen the role of national actors, including:
   o by passing at least 20% of their funding direct to national actors,
   o by giving compensation to national actors if recruiting their staff during an emergency, and
   o by including fair provision for management, administrative and overhead costs in support to national actors.