

Summary Report of the 2008 GHP meeting 1-2 July 2008

42 participants from the three pillars of the humanitarian community – the United Nations, other intergovernmental bodies, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement; and non-governmental organizations – came together in Geneva from 1-2 July in the second meeting of the Global Humanitarian Platform. Participants came together in a spirit of collaboration to consider concrete ways of strengthening their partnerships at all levels in order to improve the quality of their humanitarian response. “We need to strengthen our relationships before crises occur,” one participant urged “so that when there is a crisis we are able to work together to respond more effectively.” Many participants noted that cooperation between humanitarian actors at the global level is important, but is even more important in the field, which is where collaboration is most needed.

The meeting opened with a presentation by Peter Walker which emphasized the growing complexities facing humanitarian actors. There is a need to adapt institutional behaviour to be able to better respond to complex humanitarian crises, and to enable appropriate and flexible responses to different contexts. Peter Walker also emphasized that the creation of top heavy systems and structures due to the growth of humanitarian action is counterproductive to flexible and context specific humanitarian action. Organizations should focus on the impact of humanitarian response rather than on systems and processes.

Principles of Partnership

At the 2007 meeting of the Global Humanitarian Platform (GHP), participants had agreed on *Principles of Partnership* and committed themselves to incorporating these principles – responsibility, equality, transparency, complementarity, and results-oriented approach – into their on-going work. This year’s meeting offered an opportunity to assess the extent to which these Principles had been incorporated into the many organizations represented at the meeting. Participants generally agreed that there had been “quiet progress” in strengthening partnerships over the course of the year. The expansion of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to include more NGO representatives was a positive sign, as were some of the discussions around opening up humanitarian financing mechanisms. Some of the agencies reported that they had actively disseminated the Principles throughout their organizations, had incorporated them into their training, and were using them in conducting staff appraisals. Some NGO representatives pointed out that the Principles were useful not only in strengthening relationships between UN and non-UN actors, but also in increasing collaboration between international and national NGOs. Others noted that country teams were being expanded to reflect the diversity of representation in the GHP, while others had seen an openness in some of the humanitarian reform clusters to greater non-UN leadership. One participant noted that he had observed a real change in the culture of his organization, where staff were now expected to work collaboratively with others.

Participants had been asked to provide written reports in advance of this meeting detailing what they had done to promote the Principles in their own work and about a third had done so. There was acknowledgement that while progress had been made,

there are still gaps – and much to be done if the *Principles of Partnership* are to be mainstreamed into all aspects of humanitarian work. They not only need to be distributed within organizations, but to be disseminated, socialized, and ingrained as a new way of working. Several national NGO representatives noted that national NGOs in their countries had not heard of the Principles. Differences in approaches to security and access between different humanitarian actors remain an obstacle to better collaboration in some areas. The need to strengthen the role of national NGOs was a recurring theme throughout the discussions and participants agreed that more needs to be done to ensure their full participation in the many different forums where decisions are made about humanitarian response. The multiple accountabilities of humanitarian actors is too often an obstacle to greater collaborative action. Others noted that while the GHP brings together three pillars of humanitarian response, there is a need to engage with governments – both those experiencing humanitarian emergencies and donor governments. And while there had been cultural change in some agencies, too often the relationship between NGOs and the UN or between international and national NGOs was still conceived as a donor-implementer relationship.

Regional Workshops and Case Studies

Regional workshops held in May 2008 in Amman and Bangkok had discussed implementation of the Principles and the meeting heard reports from these workshops as well as a summary of the feedback from participants in the meeting. In Amman workshop participants felt that there should be more focus on supporting and making coordination mechanisms more inclusive of humanitarian partners on the ground, especially in the case of ‘remote programming,’ which leads to increased dependency on local partners and at the same time increased isolation. Efforts are ongoing to enhance coordination mechanisms between the UN and NGOs most notably through the creation of the Iraqi Humanitarian Forum. Participants in Bangkok echoed the need to strengthen partnerships, but also highlighted the importance of developing partnerships before disasters arise through contingency planning and preparedness, for example. They also noted the need for increased dissemination and use of the Principles, as well as called upon those meeting at the GHP to report back to the field on progress made on the GHP meetings’ conclusions.

Case studies on Myanmar and Chad illustrated some of the major challenges facing humanitarian actors. In particular, humanitarian action in Chad was characterized by difficult issues around civil-military relationships, a lack of experienced humanitarian staff and the unequal treatment of beneficiaries due to their assigned status of either refugee, IDP or host family. The case study on Myanmar illustrated the complexities of working with national and local NGOs, but also highlighted the multiple levels of UN- non-UN engagement and the need for a more systematic approach to partnership.

Commitments

Participants in the GHP strongly re-committed themselves to the *Principles of Partnership* and to mainstreaming these Principles within their organizations. They further agreed on the need for the GHP to monitor the implementation of the Principles and to report back to the field on what had been achieved.

The meeting considered a number of steps that need to be taken, including:

- Reviewing internal systems to ensure that the Principles are incorporated into recruitment, training, and appraisal systems;

- Developing a joint strategy for dissemination, including development of common messaging, standard talking points, translating the Principles into more languages, and naming focal points within each organization for the Principles; and
- Developing the website to include more possibilities for feedback mechanisms.

Participants were encouraged to work on these recommendations. However, participants agreed that the priority should be to develop 4 or 5 simple indicators on how the Principles are being used, perhaps based on those drafted by the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR), and to collect information on these indicators at the field level. This approach would allow for a more systematic assessment of the impact of the *Principles of Partnership* than the more anecdotal response, which has been followed until now.

The Next GHP Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting of the GHP will include an assessment of the impact of the *Principles of Partnership*, but that the agenda of the meeting should be structured in such a way that this discussion will take only a small percentage of the time.

There was considerable discussion about the future of the Global Humanitarian Platform, which had been conceived as a three year initiative to strengthen collaboration within the humanitarian system. Participants affirmed the GHP as a place where a diverse group of CEOs of humanitarian actors could come together to discuss issues in a spirit of equality and informality. The equal status of all three pillars and the participation of national NGOs in these discussions set the GHP apart from other international forums. While most participants strongly supported the continuation of the GHP, there was recognition of the need not to duplicate efforts underway elsewhere, in particular the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

It was agreed that the GHP could provide a forum for strategic discussion, analysis, and dynamic brainstorming on the burning issues affecting the humanitarian community. While the GHP should not be a decision-making body, its discussions could feed into other bodies, such as the IASC, as needed.

“The GHP should generate exciting discussions,” one participant remarked, “and talk about cutting-edge issues that are not being discussed in the same way elsewhere.” This discussion could include analysis of the mega-trends affecting humanitarian work, such as climate change or the business model of humanitarian response. Alternatively the GHP could take advantage of its diverse membership by focusing on the issue of national NGOs or more broadly, of capacity-building in the South, including governments. The issues of shrinking humanitarian space, growing complexities in civil-military relationships, the necessity for diversity, plurality and complementary of funding channels, increasingly restrictive security measures for UN compared to NGO staff and the emergence of new humanitarian actors are other possible topics. In terms of finalizing the topic for next year’s discussions, it was agreed that the heads of humanitarian organizations would be polled about their interest in particular topics. The importance of maintaining the engagement of CEOs in the GHP was affirmed.

Suggestions were also made to consider: scheduling the GHP around other global meetings; including a public event as part of next year's meeting of the GHP; and considering different formats to encourage even more informality in the discussions. The importance of careful preparation for the meeting was affirmed, along with the recognition that this preparation will require a commitment by participants. During the coming year, participants agreed to use the GHP as an advocacy tool to encourage other international bodies to broaden their participation along the lines of the three pillars represented in the GHP.

Finally, it was agreed that the two level structure that previously guided the GHP (Steering Committee and Working Level Group) has been abolished and has been replaced by a small working-level task force that will be charged with dissemination of the PoP, ensuring that strategic issues on partnership are taken forward at the field and HQ levels, preparing next year's meeting, including an assessment of the implementation of the *Principles of Partnership*, soliciting input into the strategic topic or topics to be discussed, and preparing the agenda, with the necessary supporting documents, for the next meeting. This small working-level task force will be composed of representatives of OCHA Geneva and the 'non-UN side' which in a preparatory meeting had agreed on a mechanism for collecting the input from their diverse participants. OCHA would agree with UN agencies and IOM on participants from their side. It is hoped that this small working-level group will be able to work together more effectively and quickly than the previous Steering Committee and Working Level Group.

The Global Humanitarian Platform will thus meet in 2009 with the twin objectives of assessing the extent to which the *Principles of Partnership* are being used to strengthen partnerships and to provide a forum for open discussion of strategic issues in the humanitarian field.

The meeting closed with expressions of appreciation to the staff who had prepared this meeting, to Elizabeth Ferris for her facilitation of the meeting, and to the participants for their lively engagement.

*Drafted by Elizabeth Ferris, Facilitator
Approved by the GHP Co-Chairs, John Holmes and Jemilah Mahmood, following
consultation with the GHP participants
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