

Strategic Considerations: Private Sector Engagement

iii. Private Sector Engagement

Why is this important?

There is an increasing number of private sector actors, in their various forms exploring how they can add value to humanitarian response, locally and internationally. This can be positive in the way that it offers a boost to humanitarian capability and humanitarian delivery, but there is also a risk that this undermines principled humanitarian action. It will take proactive engagement and collaboration between NGOs and private sector actors in order to maximize the benefits of this trend.

What are some current examples of this?

Labour rights of refugees are core for an adequate system of refugee protection. The 1951 Refugee Convention refers to the refugee's rights for gainful employment and creating also a legal basis to support entrepreneurship. Yet many years after the Refugee Convention entered into force, refugees are still often excluded from labour markets and face other hindrances to enjoy dignified labour and gain sustainable incomes. Among refugees, specific groups like youth, women or people with disabilities face double barriers to access incomes. Often refugees are hosted in communities experiencing already considerable levels of unemployment. The increased competition for jobs tends to create social tensions between new-comers and their host communities.

NGOs contribute resources and expertise to promote economic opportunities, decent work, job creation and entrepreneurship programmes for host community members and refugees, IDPs and migrants, including women, young adults, older persons and persons with disabilities

While there are investments and contributions done by NGOs on supporting employment and livelihoods, NGOs work is not fully documented and acknowledged (ie. not mentioned in specific in the GCR para. 70-71). Not enough investment is done so far by the NGO sector to document the work and lessons learnt on job and livelihood support of refugees and members of host communities, going beyond specific agencies. Consequently, in some countries and context, even though there is a need, NGOs remain reluctant to get involved in partnerships with the corporates. There are also misconceptions among some NGOs about their role in this regard, with few of them trying to take over roles that are mainly played by businesses or State actors, instead of reaching out and collaborating with them.

The business sector on the other hand, though increasingly aware of the benefits for investments in this direction, is not always supported and its collaboration with the NGO sector remains mainly to financing their activities. There are few joint business & NGO collaborations, for example on employment and livelihood of vulnerable groups, including refugees. These are also not well mapped, documented and analysed. Other important actors, States agencies, including local authorities are often working with business and NGOs, but rarely with them both in supporting employment and entrepreneurship for refugees and members of host communities.

There are other examples of private sector engagement in humanitarian action, but the common denominator is that NGOs have a poor understanding of the scope and nature of this work. This increases risk and creates missed opportunities for positive collaboration and mutual support.

The general direction is for private sector to increase the engagement with humanitarian NGOs, boosting humanitarian capability and humanitarian delivery in a principled manner, including closer to where the crisis is.

ICVA's potential added value

- Contribute for NGOs to better understand the evolving motivations and potential financial and non-financial contributions of private sector actors and for private sector to better understand how the NGOs operate.
- Engage with private sector leadership platforms or networks to offer joint space for NGOs and business community to see how best get involved and what needs to be done to make the involvement as effective as possible.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- a) To what degree is private sector engagement a priority for ICVA member organisations in relation to humanitarian action and what are the approaches being taken? How do they ensure that humanitarian principles are adhered to in cases of collaboration?
- b) What role could or should ICVA play in facilitating interaction between the private sector and humanitarian actors? For example, in terms of building mutual understanding, facilitating collaboration, including private sector in events, even going so far as to include a formal way of engaging in the network.