

The New Way of Working: What is it? What does it mean for NGOs?



On [5 October](#), ICVA and PHAP will organize the fifth online session in the [learning stream on humanitarian coordination](#). The event will focus on the New Way of Working, a new approach to emergency response adopted by eight UN humanitarian and development entities during the World Humanitarian Summit in order to work towards collective outcomes across the humanitarian and development communities.



The session will feature presentations from Hansjoerg Strohmeyer (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - OCHA, New York), Bruno Lemarquis (United Nations Development Programme - UNDP, New York); and NGO representatives, James Curtis (Danish Refugee Council - DRC, Ethiopia and Djibouti), and Lise Fouquat (Action Against Hunger - ACF, Geneva).

As an introduction to this session's topic, ICVA and PHAP had the opportunity to interview **Fabrizio Hochschild, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Strategic Coordination in the Executive Office**, whose main mandate is to ensure coherence across the UN political, peacekeeping, development, humanitarian, human rights, and rule of law portfolios.

EXPERT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What is the UN Secretary-General Antonio Gueterres' vision for the New Way of Working and how does he see the relationship of the "triple nexus" around humanitarian, development and peace actors?

The Secretary-General is a former humanitarian who approaches the New Way of Working from a pragmatic, commonsense perspective. The populations we serve do not differentiate between the three communities when receiving support and the lines of distinction can be artificial to an extent, bolstered by the way that the system is financed. The main thrust of his ambition is to ensure that humanitarian, development and peace actors respond in a context-specific manner that is driven by the situation and needs on the ground rather than preexisting frameworks and solutions.

There is also a recognition that the root causes of many of the most urgent humanitarian situations today are political, thus we cannot speak of humanitarian solutions without taking into consideration work on peace. Humanitarian access in many cases needs to be negotiated with political actors. This is not to take away from the importance of safeguarding humanitarian principles, but to recognize the need for coherence with the work of the peace and political communities.

Since your appointment in December 2016, what are the key changes already underway within the UN system and beyond, including the NGO community?

The Secretary-General has established the Executive Committee (EC), which is a cabinet-style decision-making body that meets on a weekly basis to enable him to take informed decisions on the most urgent priorities of the UN system. The Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Head of the UN Development Group are a part of the EC in addition to representatives from the political and human rights pillars. When a country situation is

analyzed, it is done so from a holistic perspective, ensuring the UN's response to a situation takes into consideration the perspectives of all three communities. There is also much more emphasis on prevention through early warning and action, which is facilitated by the EC. In several countries discussed in the EC, steps have been made to prevent a situation occurring or escalating into a crisis.

The Secretary-General is also establishing a High-Level Committee on the New Way of Working, chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General with operational leadership from OCHA and UNDP, with membership of the largest UN operational entities that work in both humanitarian and development settings. This builds on the experience from the response to the threat of famines this year, which was a first-of-a-kind effort to look at more integrated prevention and response to a crisis by the development and humanitarian communities.

There is of course much interesting new work taking place at the country level in countries such as Sudan, Lebanon, DRC and Burkina Faso. During my time as the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in the Central African Republic, the Emergency Directors Group and the Regional UN Development Group did a joint mission to kick-start work on the New Way of Working in-country with the intention of shifting planning and programming to contribute towards joint, collective outcomes under the SDGs. Ultimately, progress on the New Way of Working matters most at the country level and the structures that are put in place at Headquarters are primarily with a view of supporting that process.

In your opinion, what are the main challenges and opportunities that UN agencies and multi-mission NGOs are facing in transcending the humanitarian, development and peace divide?

Many of us are educated through a specific and circumscribed humanitarian, development, political or human rights approach that defines the way we look at a situation and the language – or jargon – we speak. The mobility between communities is not there, thus there is an illusion of separateness that is reinforced by where we come from professionally. There needs to be a significant culture shift that allows us to look at a situation in a more joined-up way, speaking a common language and understanding the other parts of the equation. This is true for both the UN and NGOs.

Similarly, donors and funding streams continue to insist on a distinction between humanitarian, development and peace work. This is of course primarily due their own constituencies, but we must get beyond this to enable flexibility in funding that supports the best response for a specific situation. Some of this was discussed during the Grand Bargain last year, but a concern remains on how the “bargain” element of this work is being taken forward within ministries to enable more flexibility in turn for efficiency and accountability from the system.

Finally, a challenge remains within the UN on mandates and how they are interpreted. For example, if we now know that the average years of displacement of a person is 17 years, we are clearly talking about rights and well-being within the timespan of a generation. Setting up solutions for displacement in a humanitarian framework is thus not sufficient, but most UN agencies working on displacement have a humanitarian mandate. This in turn upholds siloes to a certain extent. Thinking some of this through and getting beyond the confines of mandates is at the core of how we shift towards better coherence and collaboration across the various communities.

Join us on 5 October for our next session on humanitarian coordination and learn more about the New Way of Working. You can read more about this upcoming session and [register now!](#)