

SUMMARY REPORT OF THE GLOBAL HUMANITARIAN PLATFORM

11-12 JULY 2007, GENEVA

Representatives of 40 non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, and UN agencies and other intergovernmental organizations – three families of the international humanitarian community – came together in Geneva from 11-12 July 2007 for the first meeting of the Global Humanitarian Platform (GHP). This initiative seeks to improve humanitarian response by strengthening partnerships at the global and field levels and continues the work done since the July 2006 dialogue between UN and non-UN humanitarian organizations, when the GHP was created. Specifically, ‘Principles of Partnership’ have been drafted and consultations held in Indonesia, the Panama regional hub (with El Salvador chosen as a particular country in that region), and Zimbabwe to discuss their relevance at the field level. Representatives provided reports of those field level consultations to the GHP.

During the course of the meeting, participants agreed that while important steps have been taken in the past year to strengthen effective cooperation between humanitarian workers from the different families, further work is needed and they expressed their commitment to moving the process forward. Participants endorsed the attached Principles of Partnership as the basis for their strengthened partnership in the coming years and agreed to lead their organizations in new ways of working and relating to each other.

Discussion at the meeting was frank and often challenging. Participants were acutely aware of the changing realities of humanitarian action in today’s world. There are more emergency situations and natural disasters, with expectations having increased for the response to be immediate and effective. It is also likely that, in the future, the international humanitarian community will be faced with events that are not even imaginable in today’s world. The humanitarian landscape is a crowded one with a multiplication in the number of involved actors, including not only NGOs, but also local governments, the private sector, and the military. The actors are diverse, with different mandates, constituencies, expertise, and interests. They are sometimes in competition with one another for scarce resources – competition that may impede effective collaboration. There seems to be a growing perception in many parts of the world that humanitarian action is not neutral and impartial, but rather represents western/northern values and interests. Participants affirmed that partnership is essential in today’s world; these issues are too complex for any single organization to address.

The role of national NGOs in humanitarian assistance was a theme running throughout the meeting. While these organizations are often the first to respond to disasters, there was concern that their capacity is being undermined by other humanitarian actors and by the more rigorous requirements of donor governments. Participants were reminded that civil society is a complex reality, which includes not only national NGOs, but also sub-national groups, political movements, faith-based organizations, and tribal leaders who often play a significant, but often unrecognized, role in humanitarian response. Participants were concerned about the small number of participants from southern NGOs at this Platform meeting, particularly in light of last year’s recommendation to increase their participation as a priority for action, and resolved to find means of doing better in the future.

COMMITMENT

Participants in the meeting expressed their commitment to partnership at both the global and field levels. Working collaboratively, participants were reminded, is an urgent life-and-death issue. By working together more effectively, lives can be saved. Given the urgency of improving humanitarian response, participants recognized the need to move beyond “business as usual”. This shift requires a real change in the cultures of organizations and the commitment expressed at this meeting needs to be translated into effective action. While each organization’s culture will remain distinct, there is a need to differentiate between attitudes and behavior. Attitudes may be difficult to change, but it is possible to change the behavior of individuals, by being clear about what is expected.

Participants agreed to take a number of actions to translate the Principles of Partnership into more effective humanitarian response, beginning with their own organizations. Specifically, they agreed to take the following actions:

- To widely disseminate the Principles of Partnership [attached] within their own organizations, to their field staff and local partners, and to provide guidance from headquarters on how these principles should be used;
- To apply the Principles of Partnership in their policies on relationships with other humanitarian actors;
- To apply the Principles of Partnership in their processes of recruitment, training, and appraisal of staff, including Humanitarian and Resident Coordinators;
- To expect their staff to work in equal partnership with other humanitarian actors and to make it clear that turf battles will not be tolerated;
- To seek other ways within their own organizations to apply the Principles in their work and to demonstrate how partnership is being put into action in their annual plans, annual reports, other publications, and in relations with the media;
- To include the Principles of Partnership in existing collaborative mechanisms, such as memoranda of understanding, cluster initiatives, and other joint initiatives;
- To provide frank feedback to one another when problems arise; and
- To report back on progress made within each organization by next year’s meeting of the GHP.

AT THE FIELD LEVEL

While there was widespread agreement that enhanced collaboration was most needed at the field level and that parallel structures should be avoided, there was considerable discussion about the best way of achieving this collaboration. Some felt that these new forms of partnership should be piloted in a few countries, while others felt that they should be rolled-out quickly and in as many countries as possible. Some felt that new partnership teams should be established at the country level, while others argued that the existing humanitarian/IASC

country teams should simply be expanded. There was some concern expressed that partnership teams must be proposed in a way that avoids the perception that they are top-down structures being imposed from the headquarters level. There was lengthy discussion about the way forward, with the following points being proposed:

- New humanitarian partnership country teams should be implemented in a flexible way, which builds on existing coordination structures. In some cases, these will be new partnership teams; in other cases, they will replace or expand existing Humanitarian/IASC country teams; the decision should be taken among the three families; in a few cases, the political realities may make the establishment of such teams difficult.
- While flexibility is essential to reflect differences in national contexts, certain parameters were also proposed. Specifically, the teams should be formed in accordance with the Principles of Partnership, with roughly equal representation from the UN and non-UN and on the basis of equality, transparency, and mutual responsibility. The participation of national NGOs should be ensured and the teams should, in principle, be co-chaired by a UN representative and a representative of either the NGOs or the Red Cross/Red Crescent, selected by that constituency in the country. Those who participate in the country team meetings will be expected to share the results of the deliberations with those who are not able to participate in the meetings, as well as bring their views to the table, where possible.
- The humanitarian partnership teams will be a place for strategic discussions of country-specific humanitarian issues, priorities for collective action, and for ensuring both complementarity and coherence of the humanitarian response. The teams may also serve as forums for sharing best practices and for mapping the capacities and vulnerabilities in the country. By sharing strategies, plans, and budgets between humanitarian actors working in the country, transparency and mutual trust can be enhanced.
- A common approach for communicating and implementing this new initiative is urgently needed. OCHA, representatives of the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, and the NGO consortia should provide guidance on establishing the new teams.

NEW WAYS OF WORKING TOGETHER

Participants agreed to develop new forms of cooperation within, and among, the three families. The NGOs and Red Cross/Red Crescent participants agreed to meet in the months ahead to explore ways of working together more effectively and of ensuring more active engagement by national NGOs.

There was considerable support for organizing joint missions, including some with high-level representation, from each of the three families. These missions will be important symbolically and can be used to support the new partnership teams at the country level.

Participants agreed to look for opportunities to carry out joint needs assessments, evaluations, and impact assessments. In some situations, it may be useful to develop common positions on issues such as responses to military engagement in humanitarian work. Disaster Risk Reduction initiatives may offer a way of increasing local capacity.

Participants agreed on the need to engage governments to support these new ways of working. Governments, particularly donor governments, need to understand that strengthening collaborative relationships will make humanitarian response more effective and that these partnerships need to be supported. There was a suggestion that the GHP and the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative could meet at some point.

BEST PRACTICES AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Participants agreed to report back to each other next year on the following:

1. Progress made in applying the Principles of Partnership within their own organizations and into existing mechanisms, using the suggestions listed above;
2. Progress made within their own organizations and collective efforts to enhance their accountability to beneficiaries; and
3. Progress made in building local capacity.

In the meantime, there was also a suggestion to share best practices of partnerships, coordination, collaboration, capacity-building, accountability, and the application of standards, such as the Sphere Minimum Standards in Disaster Response or the *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs*, which were seen as important tools for the humanitarian community.

The follow-up mechanism of the GHP is asked to provide guidance on how these reports and sharing of best practices should be structured.

FOLLOW-UP MECHANISMS

It was proposed that meetings could be organized regionally to allow for greater participation of partners from the South and to broaden the implementation of the Principles of Partnership. These meetings could be co-convened by representatives of the UN, NGO, and Red Cross/Red Crescent families.

This agenda is an ambitious one and considerable work will be needed to implement these recommendations. The Steering Committee created last year was asked to consider ways of streamlining the follow-up mechanisms and ways of sharing the workload. For example, *ad hoc* working groups could be used to carry forward specific parts of this action plan.

NEXT YEAR

Participants endorsed the convening of a meeting next year of the GHP and agreed to focus discussions at that meeting on particular themes, such as humanitarian financing, capacity-building, or on cross-cutting issues such as access and security, including implementation of *Saving Lives Together*.

The co-chairs expressed their gratitude for participants' commitment to the process and to staff who had worked to make this meeting possible.

Principles of Partnership

A Statement of Commitment

Endorsed by the Global Humanitarian Platform, 12 July 2007

The *Global Humanitarian Platform*, created in July 2006, brings together UN and non-UN humanitarian organizations on an equal footing.

- Striving to enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian action, based on an ethical obligation and accountability to the populations we serve,
- Acknowledging diversity as an asset of the humanitarian community and recognizing the interdependence among humanitarian organizations,
- Committed to building and nurturing an effective partnership,

... the organizations participating in the **Global Humanitarian Platform** agree to base their partnership on the following principles:

- **Equality**

Equality requires mutual respect between members of the partnership irrespective of size and power. The participants must respect each other's mandates, obligations and independence and recognize each other's constraints and commitments. Mutual respect must not preclude organizations from engaging in constructive dissent.

- **Transparency**

Transparency is achieved through dialogue (on equal footing), with an emphasis on early consultations and early sharing of information. Communications and transparency, including financial transparency, increase the level of trust among organizations.

- **Result-oriented approach**

Effective humanitarian action must be reality-based and action-oriented. This requires result-oriented coordination based on effective capabilities and concrete operational capacities.

- **Responsibility**

Humanitarian organizations have an ethical obligation to each other to accomplish their tasks responsibly, with integrity and in a relevant and appropriate way. They must make sure they commit to activities only when they have the means, competencies, skills, and capacity to deliver on their commitments. Decisive and robust prevention of abuses committed by humanitarians must also be a constant effort.

- **Complementarity**

The diversity of the humanitarian community is an asset if we build on our comparative advantages and complement each other's contributions. Local capacity is one of the main assets to enhance and on which to build. Whenever possible, humanitarian organizations should strive to make it an integral part in emergency response. Language and cultural barriers must be overcome.

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