



REGIONAL CONSULTATION – LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

GUATEMALA, 5-7 MAY 2015



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Co-Chairs' Summary

The World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) regional consultation for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) was held in Guatemala City, Guatemala on 5-7 May 2015, hosted by the Government of Guatemala. It was co-chaired by the Guatemalan National Coordinator for Disaster Reduction (CONRED) and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA). The LAC regional consultation, the sixth of eight WHS regional consultations, was the first to take place within the framework of an established and recognised regional humanitarian dialogue, the International Mechanisms for Humanitarian Assistance (MIAH). By integrating the WHS LAC into the VII MIAH meeting, the former was strengthened through the already established processes, alliances, relationships and actions. Furthermore, the broad participation of different sectors in the WHS process served to strengthen and reinforce the MIAH itself, which will remain active in LAC after the WHS consultation concludes.

The meeting was preceded by a preparatory stakeholder consultation with 4,786 individuals, 50% from affected populations and civil society groups in specific situations of vulnerability. In addition, 32 consultation events were held in 23 countries, focus group discussions were held in 18 countries and individual interviews held in 13 countries. Consultations also took place through virtual spaces with the general public and with academic and non-governmental organisations. In addition, the region also hosted the first WHS consultation on Gender Equality.

This alliance of the MIAH/WHS meeting brought together more than 180 participants, panellists and facilitators from Member States, regional and sub-regional organisations, the United Nations System, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, international and national civil society organisations, academia, women's groups, indigenous people, private sector and affected communities. Roughly 52% were male and 48% were female. Additionally, representatives from Guatemala and Member States from other regions that have hosted or will host other WHS consultations were present as observers. Finally, it is recognised that the support of more than 80 collaborators guaranteed that aspects of the event were carried out successfully.

The WHS LAC was organised around the four global themes of the Summit with a fifth space for dialogue on displacement and violence added due to its high relevance and impact in the region. Within this context, some of the more frequently mentioned cross-cutting themes that emerged throughout the discussions during the VII MIAH include:

- Recognise and promote the central role of affected people and communities in humanitarian action and guarantee spaces for their empowerment and leadership in all phases of humanitarian action.
- Recognise the value of ancestral and traditional knowledge from populations as an important contribution to humanitarian action in the region.
- Reaffirm the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and operational independence with a focus on rights and inclusion and ensure that International Humanitarian Law prevails and is respected.
- Reaffirm the primary role of leadership and responsibility of the affected State in responding to the needs of its people in situations of disaster and crisis. Reinforce the imperative to develop public policy, laws and norms with a comprehensive humanitarian focus oriented towards resilience and that also address climate change and risks associated with urbanization through disaster risk reduction actions.
- Recognise the fundamental importance of holistic coordination between all actors and at all levels with particular consideration for voices and contributions of local people and communities as well as of groups that may be placed in situations of greater vulnerability or have specific needs, such as women, girls and boys, adolescents and young people, the elderly, persons with disabilities, indigenous populations, and people of African descent, among others.
- Seek complementarities and ways to reduce gaps between the humanitarian and sustainable development agendas with the aim of reducing vulnerability.
- Incorporate an inclusive vision in all humanitarian action that is based on human rights and promotes gender equality.

The following summary highlights the most salient points of the discussions as well as a series of recommendations and other general aspects of the discussions that emerged from the VII MIAH.

A full consultation report of the WHS LAC, to be published in the coming weeks, will capture the totality of conclusions, recommendations and other observations made during the whole consultation process. This report will be available at www.worldhumanitariansummit.org as well as the regional network www.redhum.org, and also www.conred.gob.gt and www.minex.gob.gt.

The Co-chairs would like to thank all actors for their participation and involvement in the WHS LAC and encourage support of the recommendations to turn them into concrete actions along with a continued discussion of key issues and exchange of information and experiences.

Humanitarian effectiveness



Given the limited resources available —financial as well as human— and the increasing pressures on them, effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action in LAC becomes imperative in order to serve the most urgent needs of people and to increase their resilience. To achieve this, existing indicators must be evaluated and either improved or replaced. This will favour accountability and transparency at all levels based on the level of satisfaction of the affected communities and of the measure of impact of humanitarian action in the wake of an increase of disasters and complex crises. This focus will allow affected persons to be at the centre of humanitarian action before, during and after disasters and crises and be recognised as architects of their own development, not merely passive and vulnerable recipients of assistance. Affected persons must include women and women’s groups, whose contributions and capacities are often ignored.

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Regional consensus exists on the value-added by the participation and inclusion of non-traditional stakeholders in the humanitarian arena such as private sector and academia, and additionally, of the risks of their participation if they are not familiar with or follow humanitarian principles. It is recognised that these actors can play a key role in preparedness, response and recovery and should commit themselves at all levels—regional, national and local—to actions that are beneficial for all stakeholders.

The middle-income level economic indicators reported by the majority of LAC countries hide the high levels of inequality that are one of the primary causes of conditions of vulnerability in segments of the population. A consequence of this economic status is that cooperation, both regional as well as international, does not take into consideration the availability of financial resources proportionate to the true need faced by populations in humanitarian situations, conditions of disaster or crisis risk reduction.

To achieve more effective coordination, it is fundamental that tools and methodologies and common goals with complementary actions are harmonised. There are gaps in the area of legal frameworks which could be reduced by the coordination between multiple actors in humanitarian action, such as the Regional Mechanism for Mutual Assistance in Disasters of the Central American Integration System (MecReg-SICA) and the Caribbean Regional Mechanism for Response coordinated by the Caribbean Disaster and Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA).

Full recognition exists of the direct responsibility of States in humanitarian leadership in the case of disasters or crises, acting through national structures and local and municipal governments in a country's affected areas.

Examples from the LAC region are highlighted in the creation of simple-to-use standard operating procedures, efficient information systems, digital databases open to all, and joint drills and simulations as concrete ways to support clarity of roles, responsibilities and levels of authority.

Recommendations:

- Adapt humanitarian response to the diverse and different needs of a crisis and to the humanitarian context in which it is operating in order to define actors, expectations and roles.
- Strengthen coordination, monitoring and reporting processes through platforms that promote the participation of the different stakeholders in humanitarian action. This could be done at various levels but in particular at the municipal level.
- Improve coordination between the different agendas and actors responsible for humanitarian action, including from the public, private, civil society and academic sectors at all levels.
- Train local authorities in the areas of preparedness and response to disasters and crises and improve national processes and protocols for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to affected communities with a focus on differentiating the response based on needs and context.¹
- Update and adapt to the context and new realities, methodologies and processes for rapid needs assessment with the participation of multidisciplinary gender-balanced teams.
- Include independent accountability mechanisms in the planning processes that involve affected people to increase levels of transparency in actions carried out by all humanitarian actors.
- Facilitate access by local organisations to international financial resources, taking into account community knowledge of their own contexts and establish clear mechanisms and procedures to understand and define the best modalities to transfer goods and services to affected populations.

- Establish clear mechanisms and procedures to understand and define the best modalities to reach affected people using cash-based assistance.
- Create or strengthen national and regional financing tools that include quicker and more flexible activation mechanisms to allow national governments to respond to small and medium scale emergencies before making an international appeal.
- Promote the private sector, academia and other new actors as strategic partners to contribute to humanitarian action and support the role of the State.
- Promote the establishment of regional financial mechanisms with contributions from the countries in the region and international donors.

Reducing vulnerability and managing risk



Recent humanitarian situations in the LAC region,² in addition to the evidence of increased risk in communities due to unplanned urbanization, extreme poverty, environmental degradation and the effects of climate change, have revealed challenges to humanitarian action and reflect the need to focus on longer-term, more sustainable development-oriented solutions that reduce the underlying causes of vulnerabilities. The increase in the frequency and intensity of natural hazards and epidemics represents major challenges to the range of actors that make up the humanitarian system in the region.

Disasters and crises have different consequences for different people and groups, and the specific needs of those who are most likely to become more vulnerable during these situations must be taken into consideration and addressed. These groups include women of reproductive age, boys and girls especially in early childhood, people with disabilities, indigenous populations, people of African descent, the elderly, and excluded and marginalised groups such as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities and minorities.

Recognising the individuality and dignity of persons is essential in order to guarantee humanitarian action that favours a dignified recovery of the recipients of assistance.

The importance of using existing technology, including geo-referencing and digital mapping, can contribute to increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the mapping of persons with specific needs.

Indigenous, traditional and ancestral knowledge are seen as critical storehouses of wisdom and should be valued and considered in all phases of humanitarian action and disaster risk reduction management.

The LAC humanitarian system must be clear about both what is meant by resilience and what is implied by actions that lead to resilience.

Recommendations:

- Reinforce existing and generate new capacities in the areas of knowledge and comprehensive risk management (vulnerabilities, threats and exposure), especially in urban contexts, with the aim of addressing the issue in a multidimensional manner, increasing community resilience and guaranteeing livelihoods.
- Contribute to Government plans at various levels to deepen work with the communities in areas of risk reduction and preparedness, particularly in the design of early warning systems.
- Systematically include humanitarian and disaster risk reduction dimensions in multi-sectorial policies for sustainable development to promote a comprehensive approach and strengthen people's resilience.

¹ 70% of people consulted in communities that participated in the consultation process indicated that they were not prepared for disasters.

² Studies such as the "Global Evaluation on Disaster Risk Reduction" (2015) and the Global Risk Report of the University of the United Nations" (2014) highlight the levels of risk exposure given different factors in LAC.

- Develop information and disaggregated data generation tools with communities that include statistics and risk maps that are accessible and easy-to-use in the community setting.
- Prioritise actions that eliminate all forms of violence—especially sexual and domestic violence—that tend to increase in post-disaster and crisis situations and affect more vulnerable persons such as women and boys and girls in a different manner.
- Develop joint professional training programs linked to issues of risk management and reduction that involve the different actors in humanitarian action and take advantage of the experience and capacities of the academic sector in the development of courses and programs in disaster risk reduction and attention to emergencies in university curricula.
- Medium and longer-term financing should be predictable and aimed at reducing barriers between humanitarian and sustainable development financing, focusing on actions in risk management, reduction, preparedness, building resilience and response.
- Recognise the role of development solutions in reducing vulnerability as an important element to address challenges. Explore the alignment of humanitarian programs with national recovery programs and how to integrate sustainable development solutions in their plans of action to ensure that the programs do not create or exacerbate socio-economic gaps in the country.
- Understand the importance of market dynamics and undertake or use vulnerability and capacity assessments to establish and adjust priorities for the most appropriate time and type of assistance (cash, vouchers or other modalities) to help strengthen local markets and contribute to building resilience.

Transformation through innovation



To face the realities and future challenges in LAC, it is essential that humanitarian actors innovate not only through new technologies but also through new and creative ways of operating. In LAC, innovation is seen as a means to an end, not an end in and of itself.

Affected persons and communities are the centre of humanitarian work and innovations must be aligned with humanitarian imperatives. Innovation is not synonymous with technology. Innovation should always take into consideration local experience and ancestral knowledge and be sustainable, relevant and necessary to the context.

The humanitarian landscape is understood to be dynamic and demands changes, which take time to be assimilated but are nevertheless necessary to keep pace with increasing challenges. These challenges and corresponding changes or responses reach across the spectrum from the global humanitarian architecture to the work done at the local and community level by first responders. The growing tendency in the humanitarian world to view the quantification of actions and the compilation of data as an efficient way of promoting accountability contributes to a reductionist focus in humanitarian planning and innovation and undermines the creativity and innovation itself.

Humanitarian innovation should promote social inclusion, clearly identify humanitarian needs and priorities and contribute to reducing vulnerability and building resilience. To accomplish this, it is necessary to ensure the active participation in humanitarian action of socially marginalised groups, particularly the full participation of girls, boys and young persons whose involvement promotes innovation and contributes to creative advances in humanitarian action.

Collaboration and cooperation are fundamental to innovation. Challenges in the current landscape, such as competition for funding, must be overcome as they can jeopardize the well being of affected people and the impact of humanitarian action. Increased collaboration will also open space for other actors and stakeholders.

Both financial and non-financial incentives must be developed for humanitarian innovation to support groups of talented people and organisations willing to contribute their creativity to humanitarian causes in the LAC region.

Recommendations:

- Base humanitarian innovation on responding to concrete needs and the demands of affected people. The process of introducing innovative initiatives should be participatory, with consultations and exchange of ideas with affected people and communities.
- Develop strategies for innovation that use traditional and ancestral knowledge and promote the participation of affected people as active agents in finding solutions. Innovation can consist of applying traditional knowledge or methods to contemporary problems.
- Use private sector tools to facilitate feedback from affected people about the quality of humanitarian assistance received and, in turn, use the information gathered to improve future programmes.
- Leverage existing national platforms and build platforms in countries where they do not yet exist to include public, private and academic sector organisations in activities to generate and strengthen community-based tools and practices to improve the quality of humanitarian action.
- Invest in developing analytical capacity and networks at all levels to identify innovative and creative opportunities to better understand and manage disaster risk and improve the efficiency and planning of humanitarian action.
- Establish Centres of Excellence to strengthen the participation of the public, private and academic sectors in generating joint training programmes and implementing innovative practices in humanitarian action.
- Systematise and develop platforms for innovation in corresponding organisations. For example, organise fairs or events at the regional or national level with each country and organisation undertaking exercises to prepare institutions to work in more innovative ways, taking into consideration financing for innovation, return on investment in activities related to innovation and disaster risk management.
- Adopt international standards for humanitarian action such as SPHERE, LEGS and the Core Humanitarian Standard and contribute to the development of principles of innovation to offer guidance to humanitarian organisations for innovation activities in the region.
- Explore concrete opportunities for innovation in areas such as access by victims of violence to protection services and livelihood support, taking into account displacement and economic losses driven by environmental and climate factors.
- Use innovations in technology and information systems to design programmes oriented to addressing specific needs in urban areas.
- Leverage existing technological platforms such as social media and telecom networks in order to fill gaps in situations of disaster and crisis, especially in urban areas where use of these platforms is prevalent.
- Prioritise a qualitative narrative in planning, implementation and accountability with and towards affected communities, replacing a quantitative approach with a human narrative that reflects the richness, complexity and interconnectivity of the experience in the most critical moments of the disaster and crisis and favours inclusion and the interests of the most vulnerable.

Displacement and violence



A space for dialogue on Displacement and Violence was included in the WHS LAC meeting as an independent theme given the relevance and impact of these issues in the region. Four of the five countries and 43 of the 50 cities with the highest levels of violence at the global level are located in the LAC region.³ Additionally, by the end of 2013, at least 6.3 million people had been subject to internal displacement in the Americas, clearly constituting a concern for humanitarian action.

³www.forbes.com.mx/las-50-ciudades-mas-violentas-del-mundo/ and in <http://www.infobae.com/2014/08/30/1591127-las-10-ciudades-mas-seguras-y-las-10-mas-peligrosa-del-mundo> (27042015), the latter based on data from the United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime

The high levels of violence and insecurity challenge humanitarian action and raise questions about the application of humanitarian standards to other frontline actors who face these situations on a day-to-day basis.

The challenge of humanitarian action in urban contexts is an ever-growing priority since the majority of displaced persons are moving into cities where vulnerabilities are often exacerbated and generate new forms of non-conventional violence. These manifestations of violence must be recognised and mechanisms that highlight the risks from a multi-sectorial approach that do not stigmatise the communities must be established.

Taking a more comprehensive approach to security includes guaranteeing and protecting victim rights as well as looking beyond the presence of law enforcement authorities. The underlying causes of violence and their consequences need to be understood in order to develop effective and appropriate strategies to address them.

Other issues that should continue to be monitored and addressed include building an increased understanding of threats and risks, strengthening networks and dialogue with youth, increased precision regarding the concept of “victim” and regulations regarding the listing of the humanitarian visa category and its corresponding specifications.

The objective of the dialogue on displacement and violence during the WHS LAC meeting was to generate an open conversation among participants based on the key findings of the consultation process as well as consider the presentations of four panellists who represented perspectives from the global, regional and local levels. The session did not aim to establish conclusions, recommendations or action points. The following are a few central points of reflection from the Co-Chairs based on the dialogue.

Key considerations:

- Participants reaffirmed the fundamental role of the State to guarantee the security of citizens, emphasising that all initiatives that seek to increase capacities must be situated within a framework of locally defined priorities and always respect the principle of sovereignty and internationally agreed-upon humanitarian principles.
- LAC has a regional legal framework for refugees—the Cartagena Declaration—that is recognised as a global model used by other regions to address refugee issues. Participants recognised the importance of having national and regional normative frameworks for these issues, especially for the protection of and assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs).
- Access by humanitarian actors to places with a high incidence of violence presents enormous challenges for humanitarian action, especially as those displaced in urban areas are highly mobile and often seek anonymity. Participants recognised the importance and role of local actors who have access to and the trust of communities in these areas. International entities were invited to work closely with local networks with access to affected persons and an understanding of the context dynamics. The different forms of violence were identified as a fundamental cause of displacement and migration of populations in the region.
- Humanitarians recognised that humanitarian access is critical and should not be taken for granted.
- Deeper knowledge and a more concerted approach are needed to confront the fundamental drivers of violence such as rapid unplanned urbanization, marginalisation, discrimination, lack of socio-economic opportunities, corruption, impunity and institutional weakness. Breaking the cycle of violence, therefore, requires a comprehensive response to sustainable development.
- Participants recognised that the involvement of the community is essential to understand and address violence from the perspective of the context where it occurs.
- Each country is faced with different issues related to violence and displacement, but as many participants recognised, these problems require regional solutions due to the cross-border nature of migration.
- Participants noted the importance of having systems and tools to monitor the situation of violence and displacement in the LAC region and that protect the identity of affected persons. The potential for a network to exchange information with a view to having better understanding of the issues was also raised.
- The majority of displaced people are located in urban areas where they are not visible and they do not have access to basic services, employment or assistance, making them more vulnerable to disaster risks.

- Women, boys and girls, adolescents and young people, indigenous groups and people of African descent have specific needs in situations of violence and displacement and are the most affected. As a result, they are essential both in drawing attention to and reducing this phenomenon. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and human trafficking in these contexts.
- Finally, participants noted the importance of creating strategies for holistic human development to address the root causes of violence and to avoid stigmatisation of people living in violent contexts.
- Non-conventional violence has multiple interpretations and the term should be used with caution given that in some cases, the interpretations could deviate from humanitarian principles and objectives.

Serving the needs of people in conflict



Although gripped with very high levels of violence, the region suffers less from inter and intra-state conflict compared to other regions of the world. As such, the applicability of the issue was limited and was not addressed in all countries during the consultation process. Where it was discussed, stakeholders noted that the general objective of humanitarian actors is to ensure the access and support of all people affected by conflicts and that strategies be developed to achieve this.

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There is concern that in certain cases, limited understanding of the complexities of conflict may hinder effective present and future humanitarian action. Implementation of humanitarian programming and the promotion of a rights-based approach was recommended to improve action and impact.

Conflict affects different people, groups and sectors in different ways. Certain population groups and non-combatants become more vulnerable and are exposed to increased risk in situations of conflict, and this reality must be acknowledged and addressed.

This section reflects the elements that were highlighted by participants in the national consultations and the perspectives gathered in the Preparatory Stakeholder Analysis, which noted four areas for further exploration under the topic serving the needs of people in conflict. It does not aim to establish recommendations but rather to highlight some of the most important aspects of the document and the panel that addressed this theme. Given this approach, the general aspects of the discussion included the following:

- The international humanitarian system needs to adapt to different contexts based on a thorough and in depth analysis of the particular characteristics of conflict contexts in contrast to disaster contexts, and its actions should aim to strengthen and complement the capacities of national and local institutions.
- Programme planning should be approached in a holistic way, including the provision of basic services and protection to serve the needs of people affected by conflict, particularly the specific needs of different groups of the affected population.
- A call to consider the central role of affected people and communities and their participation in finding solutions to their own challenges with a focus on differentiated and sex-disaggregated approaches based on different needs.
- Managing information in a holistic and interconnected manner is fundamental to understanding the realities of affected people and to communicating information to relevant actors in order to most effectively serve affected people.

- The notion and importance of coordination and connection between international, national and local actors was highlighted, particularly with respect to the importance of countries establishing legal frameworks and public policies for serving the needs of people in conflict that are complementary to international frameworks and include International Humanitarian Law.
- Humanitarian action must be linked with sustainable development and exit strategies with appropriate timeframes must be developed for humanitarian aid/actors.
- The importance and principal role of the state was noted as well as the utility of adopting normative and legal frameworks for the protection of all people, including internally displaced people.