

Montreux XIII Humanitarian Retreat

1-2 December 2014

Conveners' Conclusions

Introduction

The thirteenth retreat entitled, "Game Changers: Creating a More Open and Adaptive Humanitarian Response", was held in Montreux on 1 – 2 December 2014 at the invitation of the Geneva-based Convening Group (Canada, Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, Sweden and the United States). Participation totaled 66 people and included senior representatives from governments; humanitarian, development and peace-building agencies and organizations; and academic institutions and the private sector.

Montreux XIII asked participants to consider the changing humanitarian landscape and how well the actors in the system are adjusting to it. A new framework¹ for conceptualizing humanitarian response based on four typologies or models – comprehensive, consultative, collaborative, and constrained – was presented to bring more clarity to the interface between national capacities, affected populations, and international responses and to serve as the basis for the discussion. The retreat resulted in a call for a humanitarian system that is more open and adaptive as well as a humanitarian approach that is better informed and more broadly supported. Going forward, humanitarian actors should shift the priority from improving internal coordination structures to improving the operational means to better meet the needs of crisis-affected people in terms of protection and service delivery.

General Observations and Action Points

Contextual Analysis: Get it Right

The international community has made significant progress in recent years to improve assessments of humanitarian needs at the onset of a crisis. However, there has been only limited reflection by the international community on the existing capacities within crisis-affected States and on broader political and socio-economic factors when designing humanitarian responses. As a result, there is a tendency for the international system to employ the same type of comprehensive approach to most crises at the onset and throughout the duration of a crisis. Failing to adapt the response means people will not get the protection they need and can lead to wasted resources; inefficient, "too high-tech" solutions; promoting dependency on aid; and deterring governments from their responsibility to protect and aid their own people. In addition, it misses the opportunity to build trust with affected people that can in turn impact on access of security, and to identify sustainable transitions out of international humanitarian assistance.

Participants emphasized that there must be a "mind shift" from planning humanitarian response in isolation from other interventions, such as PKOs, economic stabilization or political missions. Similarly, political action or inaction often has humanitarian consequences which are not taken into consideration. In concrete terms, this means that the international response system, led by the UN and international NGOs, must have more robust analytical evidence before deciding which model of response to use depending on the situation in the country or region.

¹ See background commissioned from ALNAP entitled "Responding to changing needs? Challenges and opportunities for humanitarian action" written by Ben Ramalingam and John Mitchell, November 2014.

- 1) **The international community should invest more before and at the onset of a crisis in a comprehensive analysis of the situation and use this to guide strategic-level decision-making.**
 - a) *A framework for this comprehensive analysis should be designed and piloted in priority countries;*
 - b) *A forum should be created/piloted to bring together relevant actors – including from peace and security, political, humanitarian and development fields – to undertake a comprehensive analysis (including counter-factual crisis analysis) before and at the onset of a crisis to arrive at a common narrative regarding the situation and to design a multi-faceted response;*
 - c) *Staff in all relevant sectors should be familiarized with this approach to ensure their ability to provide input to the framework and to use the results of the analysis in programming.*

- 2) **International response strategies must be better calibrated to the existing national and local capacities of the crisis-affected state. This calls for a more flexible and adaptive approach at the onset of a crisis (one size does not fit all contexts); throughout the country where capacities may vary geographically; and over time.**
 - a) *An analysis of local capacities – particularly in terms of protecting those in need -- before and at the onset of a crisis should be undertaken to serve as the “global adaptor” to enable the international community to move towards a more collaborative model of assistance wherever possible so as to minimize the use of international assets while still supporting a principled response;*
 - b) *Local and international humanitarian actors should undertake periodic analytical reviews of the response as the situation evolves to determine how to move towards more nationally-based assistance programs when possible;*
 - c) *Authority should be decentralized to the decision makers closest to the intervention.*

Roles and Responsibilities: Know Thyself

As the drivers of crises have become more complex and numerous, the demands on international humanitarian actors have sky-rocketed. The boundaries of international humanitarian aid have expanded beyond life-saving principled approaches to include broader social welfare, despite agencies' maintaining relatively constant mandates, systems and identities. The international humanitarian system, though not broken, is under increasing strain. There is therefore a need to clarify the role of international humanitarian actors and humanitarian interventions relative to other international actors (especially development actors) and to national and local actors. It was recognized that international partners have limitations when operating in constrained environments. As a result, donors and decision-makers must place greater emphasis on the comparative advantages of different actors, entailing a need for a greater degree of risk-taking. At the same time, a number of middle-income countries and lower-middle income countries have increased their own national capacities as well as the capacity of their growing civil societies, diaspora, and private sector, thereby increasing the prospect for greater operational collaboration with crisis-affected countries.

- 1) **As the models for international cooperation evolve to become more collaborative, or more constrained due to insecurity, different partnerships will likely emerge.**
 - a) *International cooperation systems must be sufficiently flexible to engage – including with funding -- a wide variety of partners at all levels, depending upon the situation. Donors and partners must consider the impact of the intervention*

relative to the delivery mechanism, especially when operating in constrained contexts; this includes the recognition of each other's comparative advantage in specific situations and for specific purposes;

- b) There should be agreement on adherence to humanitarian principles by partners at all levels. The international humanitarian community should work with national and local actors to identify appropriate accountability mechanisms to balance increased risk of engaging with new partners and to enable greater flexibility from donors;*
 - c) International partners should build an "exit strategy" into emergency response by building capacity of local partners from the beginning. To this end, donors may consider benchmarking local partnerships in their funding arrangements;*
 - d) Given the inconclusive results to date, more evidence is needed to identify successful approaches to building sustainable capacity at the local level. The IFRC model and experience of national and local capacity building should be considered in this regard.*
- 2) Humanitarian and development programs must both strive for long-term sustainability, based on a shared analysis of the context. Before and at the onset of a crisis, humanitarian and development actors should see where they can merge their coordination and analytical architectures.**
- a) Transparency should be improved by all in terms of funding for crisis response at the country level so as to enable better coordination and planning;*
 - b) The international community should explore opportunities for matching funding with governments of crisis-affected states and local entities for humanitarian programs in collaborative/consultative situations;*
 - c) Where good governance is in place, the international community should also seek to provide aid through existing public institutions;*
 - d) Continue to support focused conversations between humanitarian actors (OCHA, UNHCR and WFP etc.) and development actors (such as WB and UNDP) on roles and responsibilities.*
- 3) There is need for far greater political engagement and advocacy before and during crises to prevent and limit human suffering.**
- a) Governments of crisis-affected States have the primary responsibility to protect and assist their people. To this end, the international community can assist in promoting robust local accountability frameworks and monitoring structures for crisis response.*
 - b) A different accountability paradigm is needed at the global level as well, to recognize the humanitarian consequences of political actions or inaction. In this regard, counter-factual analysis of the potential humanitarian impact on fragile states should be undertaken;*
 - c) Member States should provide consistent messaging, including at the World Humanitarian Summit, regarding the need for greater political engagement and advocacy to address protection gaps;*
 - d) Member States and humanitarian partners should clearly articulate expectations from UN leadership with regards to addressing protection gaps in conflicts.*

Next Steps

Conveners will advance these observations through various forums and engagement opportunities in which they participate and lead, including:

- In the Good Humanitarian Donorship group co-chaired by Canada and the United States;
- In the Humanitarian Liaison Working Group chaired by Norway;
- In the upcoming OCHA Donor Support Group which Sweden will chair in 2015/2016;
- In a World Humanitarian Summit Thematic consultation on Humanitarian Aid Effectiveness in June 2015 co-organized by ALNAP, the United States, the OIC and the WHS;
- In the Humanitarian Liaison Working Group chaired by the Netherlands in New York;
- In the World Humanitarian Summit Global Consultation co-chaired by Switzerland.

Other participants also committed to undertake the following activities:

- ALNAP will publicize these conclusions on its website and its bulletin for members;
- The *Center for Humanitarian Dialogue* will host a roundtable discussion with relevant stakeholders to consider ways of advancing observations and action points regarding protection;
- Interpeace and other relevant stakeholders will work to identify concrete analytical tools and steps to enhance dialogue with local stakeholders.
- *DCAF* will pilot a forum for multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral analysis on selected crisis situations.

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