

2023 Humanitarian  
Leadership Conference

26-28 April

# Re-engineering the global disaster response system

## 2023 Humanitarian Leadership Conference: Sub-Themes

### Money

*Currently, there is not enough money in the system to pay for the overwhelming amount of assistance necessary to respond to disasters – why? How can we change where the money comes from and the form in which it is provided to enable timely assistance at the scale required?*

The financing needs for responses summarised in the [Global Humanitarian Overview](#) are at historical highs and yet, in a world wealthier than ever before, there remains major funding shortfalls. These financing needs omit the needs of national disaster management authorities which respond to the increasing number of disasters (born from intra-communal conflict, wars, locust plagues, droughts, extreme flooding or any other hazard) without international assistance. Nor do they include the funding needs of those very local groups, associations, committees, and organisations that do the vast majority of disaster response. This sub-theme explores provocative questions around ‘money’:

How are crisis responses paid for? How should they be paid for? By whom? Through what mechanisms? Is universal basic income the answer for keeping resources and capabilities as local as possible? How can appropriate funds be channelled to relevant actors in complex conflicts, in fragile contexts? We need to be pragmatic about how to expand the pool of people and organisations that fund crisis response, domestically and internationally. What type of financing instruments could be useful in doing so? Prizes? Core funding to local disaster committees? How to fund the interplay between actors working for a positive peace and humanitarian assistance? Is there really no financial return from humanitarian action, for anyone? What are the risks inherent in commodifying crisis responses, if any? How could (does) risk layering work at a system-level, in fragile and non-fragile contexts? Are there any examples of innovative disaster response financing, at any scale?

### Mandates

*Every organisation that responds to a crisis has its own mandate, and many have very similar mandates – is this the best way forward? Who are the legitimate actors with the mandate to respond (or support the response) in the eyes of those affected by disasters?*

Many of the dominant actors in the global disaster response system have mandates that were established in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the development of most of these mandates was not coordinated. Persistent challenges around the ‘triple nexus’ exemplify the challenges of uncoordinated mandates. The mandates of these actors were predominantly created in and by Western countries – are they still legitimate and do their mandates still resonate? How much of an impact does an organisation’s mandate have on its behaviour? Who does have the mandate(s) to

respond and does this change when people need assistance due to different drivers of disaster risks (fragility, hydro-meteorological hazards, conflict, drought, etc)? Is this mandate shared – can it be shared? Who has the mandate to respond – and the responsibility to respond – according to local communities? Closely associated to mandates are the humanitarian principles – are these still fit for purpose or do they also need re-engineering? How can questions of neutrality and humanitarian assistance be overcome in contexts of international condemnation of only one warring party?

At the global level, the cluster system was established in 2005 to better coordinate these diverse mandates and their organisations' associated responses. However, there remains challenges with the system, including its relevance to peace and development organisations and activities. How can we better collaborate across such diverse mandates in such differing contexts...or do they need re-writing? Are existing mandates fit for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Should we do away with multi-mandate organisations and if so, what should replace them? Or should we be strengthening organisations taking a holistic approach to mandates of providing assistance?

### Models

*What are the advantages and disadvantages of the organisational models that dominate the global disaster response system? How could different organisational models enable better responses?*

Global initiatives to increase the prominence of local and national actors have not delivered on their promises. Many humanitarian and emergency management reforms have failed to improve the scale, timeliness, and quality of assistance provided to people affected by disasters, conflicts, wars, slow and rapid-onset crises. Are the organisational models of different actors part of the problem? This sub-theme explores provocative questions around the organisational models used in the global disaster response system:

How crisis response is funded is constrained by the organisational models of both the providers of funds and the recipients of funds, including the intermediaries – what needs to change? Are registered charities the right model for disaster response? What needs to change? Are there inherent tensions between the humanitarian principles and businesses? Do Distributed Autonomous Organisations (DAOs) hold any relevant value? Are the current dominant vertical integration models the best way to organise organisations? Are networks of suppliers more fit for purpose? How could this realistically be implemented? Are there any examples of non-traditional models in disaster response and humanitarian action that could be used as guides for change?

### Motivation

*How do we change the incentive structures of the current global disaster response system to better encourage a more inclusive, respectful, empowering, and resourced system?*

People are motivated to behave in different ways by a complex range of factors, perhaps most prominently by specific incentives they are presented with – this is also true of people and organisations involved in the global disaster response system. A clear example is the incentive for politicians to act when a disaster receives high amounts of public concern, compounded by high media coverage of the disaster. There are disincentives to mitigate and prepare for disasters of all kinds as the costs of doing so are often only beneficial when a disaster occurs. Another example is the disincentive to act in complexity, or an incentive to behave simply when navigating complex crises.

Are the current motivations, incentives, and purposes of crisis response actors encouraging good practices? How should they be changed? To what? And applied to whom? What are the current

rewards in crisis response and are these appropriate? Should they be changed – to what? How can better responses be encouraged without the profit driver? What motivates actors to respond to crises in the best way possible? How can political motivations be better harnessed for better humanitarian outcomes? How does this change, at all, in fragile contexts? How can the disincentives to act in a disaster be overcome?