EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OCHA EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA WORKSHOP ON HUMANITARIAN PARTNERSHIP
14-15 June 2012

Word cloud from transcript of the workshop identifying key concepts.

Event Summary

On 14-15 June, in Stellenbosch, South Africa, OCHA's Policy Development and Studies Branch and its Regional Office for Southern Africa (ROSA), in conjunction with Stellenbosch University, convened a two-day workshop that brought together over 40 individuals from 11 countries,[1] primarily from southern and eastern Africa. Delegates included academic institutions from the PeriPeri University disaster risk reduction (DRR)

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[1] Ethiopia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Kenya, Somalia, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda, as well Algeria and Ghana.

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partnership[2], regional organizations (SADC), National and religious NGOs and Red Cross Societies, as well as regional representatives of IFRC, WFP, UNICEF, IOM and USAID.

The participants brought a diverse range of experience and expertise in the fields of disaster risk reduction and humanitarian response. The discussion focused on improving the effectiveness of humanitarian partnerships in light of the current and changing nature of humanitarian emergencies and response in the region.

In order to maximise opportunities for individuals to interact with others from different backgrounds and experiences, in each of the sessions, brief presentations were combined with facilitated small groups to stimulate and guide dialogue. As the discussion proceeded, people captured questions, comments and ideas anonymously, using a system of wirelessly connected netbooks called the TEAMWIN Collaborator. A complete transcript of the ideas and comments captured in the workshop is provided below.

OCHA came to the workshop in "listening" mode to identify the key themes and priorities that different groups in the region had. Several priorities emerged from the ensuing discussions:

Investing in community knowledge and capacities

Given the key role of local communities as primary responders, the flow of information to and from the community level was seen as a crucial element of early warning, needs assessment and accountability. Participants identified a need for humanitarian actors to find ways to work better at the community level and help improve local capacity for disaster response and prevention.

Understanding local contexts was also seen as a pre-requisite for international actors, who were encouraged to ensure that they had sufficient local knowledge before attempting any intervention - "if you don't know, don't go". Indeed, many participants suggested that there were widespread opportunities for international actors to learn from local models and modalities of assistance.

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[2] Periperi U is a platform for university partnership to reduce disaster risks in Africa. It stands for 'Partners Enhancing Resilience to People Exposed to Risks' – with a special focus on advancing university action on risk and vulnerability reduction in Africa. http://riskreductionafrica.org/en/rra-ddr-per/rra-whatisperiperi

Participants stressed that there were numerous lessons that regions, countries and communities in Africa could learn from each other and that there was a need for international engagement and support for regional knowledge-sharing platforms to allow this. The Peri-Peri University initiative was cited as one such example of South-South cooperation.

Working better with Governments

Although the community level was seen as key, it was also emphasised that recognising the critical role of government at all levels remained an essential aspect of effective response. It was repeatedly emphasized that international actors had to avoid bypassing governments when engaging with affected populations. As Governments' role was critical in terms of developing policies to avert future risks and vulnerability, and in developing the legal framework to support humanitarian space, participants underlined that humanitarians needed to find better ways to engage authorities before a crisis occurs.

Strengthening engagement with the private sector

Humanitarian actors were called upon to nuance their understanding of the role of the private sector, going beyond a view of businesses as simple sources of finance. Instead, private actors should be embraced as a rich source of ideas, answers and many kinds of resources, as well as critical stakeholders that can benefit from faster recovery and improved mitigation measures. The challenge for humanitarians was to engage the private sector more proactively, identifying opportunities for collaboration before a crisis, so that the role of businesses included planning and preparedness and not just response.

Participants identified opportunities to leverage the private sector for investment in capacity development for humanitarian action at the local level, but that also required that humanitarian and development actors help the development of a vibrant private sector at the local level. Indeed, just as community action was paramount in humanitarian response, so the role of local businesses was as important as the burgeoning impact of international corporations in humanitarian activities.

More support for resilience and DRR

Participants expressed concern that humanitarian programming could encourage dependency and lead to a 'humanitarian trap'. They emphasized the importance of building the capacities of local communities to help themselves. This related to the question of how to build resilience and reduce vulnerabilities, with participants emphasizing that there was work to do in mapping existing patterns and capacities at the community level. This would allow lessons to be shared with other communities at similar levels of development and infrastructure.

Participants also stressed that there was a need to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the causes of suffering, including through more detailed post-disaster forensic analysis. Only through better understanding what happened and why in a specific instance, will it be possible to address problems efficiently.

Humanitarian Partnership Mission Statement

A Partnership based on our shared goals of:

- *Involving beneficiaries, and holding ourselves accountable to them;*
- *Building a fully inclusive humanitarian system;*
- *Leveraging local knowledge and capacities;*
- *Learning and innovating in how to be better prepared and better responders,*
      ...and commitment to:
- *Taking forward the discussion on accountability within our individual organizations;*
- *Investing in local and regional knowledge and skills.*

Next steps

Participants made a range of individual commitments to enhance partnership towards strengthening humanitarian response in their countries and to work more closely with OCHA in the future. They specifically requested OCHA to support further work on:
- Influencing national and regional governmental policies on DRR and humanitarian

space;

- Investing in knowledge creation and dissemination around DRR rather than solely focusing on response;
- Supporting linkages between relevant international organizations and universities, private sector and other 'non-traditional' partners.

Individual commitments[3] made by partners included to:

- Continue carrying out investigation on topics of interest to communities' development and disseminate the results in a 'digestible' way to the consumer/s (communities, NGOs, Government...) (Mozambique)
- Engage with my Government in an interface meeting to follow up on humanitarian needs mainly by advocating for approval of the DRM policy and finalisation of the Climate Change policy (Malawi).
- Continue to assist in the strengthening of African Academic Networks, and bring developmental issues such as disaster risk reduction and humanitarian assistance to the fore front of our agendas (South Africa)
- Continue to strengthen our capacity to train and generate knowledge in the area of disaster risk reduction (based of priorities) and sustainable development (Ethiopia)
- Continue to advocate for new policies on DRM towards Government with the community of NGO working on DRR thematics. (Madagascar)
- Work closely with humanitarian organisations such as ActionAid and Red Cross in the research process for ensuring that the researches are responsive to the actual needs of the communities pertinent to enhancing their resilience to disasters. (Tanzania)
- Increase professionalism of national NGOs to allow them to adhere to international standards of humanitarian relief work and improve their technical skills in DRR issues, especially in the areas of risk surveying as well as in the use of techniques of Conservation Farming for food production in semiarid zones. (Mozambique)
- Report to top management for more advocacies for the strengthening of the coordination and the partnership involving key stakeholders through the legal framework, taking in account the countries' experiences, expertise of the DRR team and lessons learnt from this kind of fora. (SADC)
- Disseminate the primary issues and the main 'Heres', 'Theres' and some of the suggested 'Solutions' to the UNICEF network in all 21 country programs in Eastern and Southern Africa in the context of how UNICEF can be a better partner in

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[3] A full list of individual commitments is on page 42.

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supporting Humanitarian Action including DRR. Advocate for a more relevant approach to regional inter-agency humanitarian cooperation led by OCHA. (UNICEF)

- Advocate for increasing our interaction with Universities and looking into possible partnerships aiming at developing mitigation related studies of mutual interest (IOM).

Participants proposed to hold a follow-up workshop next year to continue developing partnerships and ideas in the region, and follow up on the individual commitments made at the conference.

Participants also agreed on a mission statement for partnerships emerging from this forum:

<u>Session Summaries</u>

1. Humanitarian challenges in the region and how we can adapt

Dr. Rui da Maia (Technical University of Mozambique) and Mr. Misikir Tilahun (Africa Humanitarian Action) presented an overview of key regional challenges, which was followed by a discussion among participants about priorities and challenges for humanitarian action in the region.

Dr. da Maia presented a multidimensional map of the continent which served as a tool to identify trends in humanitarian need, as well as humanitarian 'hotspots' that should be priorities for intervention. The tool highlights structural issues which drive vulnerability and participants expressed a wish that it be shared further, for example with the AU.

Regional early warning systems were cited as particularly valuable, given that emergencies in one region often affected other areas. The presenters pointed to SADC's Southern Africa Region Climate Outlook Forum (SARCOF) system, a seasonal climate prediction tool for agriculture in southern Africa, as one such initiative already in-progress. In response to the map of humanitarian 'hotspots' presented by Dr. da Maia, it was noted that countries - especially those with institutional deficits - could find themselves in a 'humanitarian trap', where

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humanitarian action created a dependency on interventions while leaving societies unable to support themselves without aid.

Mr. Tilahun presented on key regional challenges, which in the East African context he identified as (i) lack of independent resources; (ii) a shrinking humanitarian space and (iii) operational challenges (including a lack of skilled workers and high costs of materials). He also introduced AHA's own programming in Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia. Respondents called for programming which included resilience and DRR as part of a humanitarian-development continuum, given that droughts in the Horn of Africa were regular, predictable events. Participants also stressed the importance of knowledge, both in terms of local understanding (e.g. the effect of humanitarian response on local economies) and effective dissemination of information.

With strengthened partnerships in mind, there was emphasis on the distinctive roles of key groups, including donors, the media, governments, NGOs, the UN and the private sector and how these actors could better collaborate.
 One theme was the need for more effective South-South partnerships, which could provide a forum to share valuable lessons.

The session concluded with participants sharing an overview of the specific local challenges faced in participants' own countries. Common themes included the importance of good governance and for platforms for civil society to mobilize, undertake initiatives and advocate.

2. *Decision-making at regional, national and sub-national levels*

Introducing the 2011 Somalia famine as 'the most dire humanitarian situation in the world', Ms. Altshul addressed the humanitarian system's failure quickly to respond to early warning signs and subsequent flaws in the system which served as obstacles to the use of cash transfers at-scale. Aversion to use of cash was found not to have been driven by a lack of evidence, but rather by a deficit of leadership and discomfort with risk. Ms. Altshul argued that partnerships between INGOs had been instrumental to successful response and that a consortium approach encouraged learning and quality. At the systemic level, a greater openness towards innovation was required to combat a

'conformity' which could stymie effective new developments such as the use of cash transfers at-scale.

Delegates reflected on 'good' decisions that have been made in specific responses. Examples cited included social protection mechanisms ('safety nets'); effective early warning systems and DRR programming as an aspect of all activities – including vulnerability capacity assessments. The pro-active involvement of governments in terms of policy formulation, leadership and coordination was a recurring theme, but was considered only part of the solution; equally important was the notion that 'good decisions flow from assessments that involve communities to eliminate top-down solutions'.

In contrast, reflecting on 'bad' decisions, participants identified responses suffering from deficits of good governance, particularly where vested interests were involved. A 'downward cascade' of decision-making from the international to the local level was held responsible for decisions that were insufficiently informed by local context. Therefore, more consistent information flows to and from communities were required to improve the quality of humanitarian decision-making. A general lack of accountability was seen as an obstacle to timely incorporation of 'lessons learned' through past failures.

Improvements suggested to the current system of decision-making included enhanced partnerships, not least with the business community; support for research into vulnerability and DRR issues and creating knowledge sharing platforms, particularly between local communities. With regard to humanitarian decision-making, 'culture', one participant argued, 'is man-made. It can be changed through education'.

3. *Links to communities and non-traditional partners*

Participants explored how the humanitarian system could link better to communities, both in order to improve understanding of their needs and to ensure that humanitarian actors are truly accountable. They also considered how to create stronger linkages with non-traditional partners who 'understand' different contexts. One finding was that existing community methods of resilience should be further investigated to see what practices could be effectively replicated. Preparedness in was key - structures needed

to be identified before an emergency so that agencies on the ground had appropriate baseline knowledge. Furthermore, by committing to long-term engagement, agencies could strengthen their accountability while simultaneously accruing essential contextual knowledge.

Participants stressed that collaborating with existing organisational structures was an important way of gathering information, but informal structures should also be used in a complementary fashion. Accordingly, participants called for an expansive understanding of 'communities' and stressed that to avoid exclusion (for example of minorities, women and children), humanitarian actors should ensure the representativeness of their interlocutors.   Concrete measures to enhance responsiveness to communities were also proposed, such as the use of suggestion boxes in public places.

In the context of accountability, participants voiced a need for transparency. At present, there was a lack of clarity over who the humanitarian community was accountable to. For participants, it was not clear where the buck stopped within the UN system, nor was there enough 'lateral accountability', i.e. information sharing between NGOs, international agencies and governments.   As indicated above, thorough knowledge was deemed a *sine qua non* of any intervention: 'if you don't know, don't go'.

4. *Preparedness, resilience and the longer-term*

At the start of the session, Mr. Xavier Agostinho Chavana (Government of Mozambique) shared with participants the experience of Mozambique in the wake of the 2000 floods. A cyclone warning system (CWS) and Inter-district Operational Flood Warning System (SIDPABB) were set up in Buzi. The latter consists of three essential components: (i) measurement; (ii) central data analysis; (iii) community action. A centerpiece of the system was Local Committees that were made up of 15-18 volunteers, led by the community leader. The system had bolstered disaster preparedness and was being expanded to other areas at risk of flooding.

Mr. Chavana then presented on the institutional environment in Mozambique, detailing

the impact of disasters in the country, before charting the evolution of flood management systems. This includes the gradual establishment of regional water authorities across the country and the creation of a disaster management authority with a corresponding legal framework. The role of local communities is a crucial component in the system and CSOs are closely involved in consultations on contingency planning. In closing, Mr. Chavana argued that humanitarian programming should receive less priority in order to reduce dependence and that instead, development interventions should emphasized in order to reduce vulnerability.

In the ensuing discussion, there was emphasis on the importance of communication between disaster management authorities across borders, as well as the optimal balance between an effective government-managed system and an appropriate degree of consultation.

'Building back better' to avoid repeating cycles of similar responses was also a topic of discussion, with an emphasis on mainstreaming DRR into (development) programming, improving early warning systems, conducting more effective needs assessments (incorporating both rapid assessment for immediate response and a more comprehensive sector-based assessment) and investing in human capacity.

5. *Partnerships and the way forward*

In the concluding session, Mr. Ignacio Leon of OCHA reiterated the principles of humanitarian partnership expounded by the Global Humanitarian Platform (2008). These were equality, transparency, complementarity and results-orientation.   He proposed a 'new humanitarian partnership' comprised of three pillars: 1) mutual acknowledgement of capacities, expertise and gaps; 2) transfer of knowledge and 3) common objectives and results.

The elements of effective partnerships were debated among delegates who stressed that even if equality was not attainable in its literal sense, if partners respected each other, shared their skills and expertise and worked towards common objectives then improved results would be seen. Participants detailed a shared vision to move from a humanitarian system too often plagued by asymmetrical power relationships, political

agendas, short-termism and fragmentation to one characterized by shared goals, effective engagement of affected communities, and enhanced local, national and regional capacities.