Mobile industry consultation: Leveraging the power of mobile for humanitarian response

Meeting Report

3 March 2015, 9.00-12.30, Barcelona, Spain

I. Context and set-up of business consultation

The mobile industry business consultation was organized by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the GSM Association (GSMA) in the margins of the Mobile World Congress (MWC). The GSMA represents the interests of mobile network operators (MNOs) in more than 220 countries and unites more than 800 of them with 250 companies in the broader mobile industry. GSMA has been an OCHA partner for strategic and operational issues since 2011.

OCHA is conducting dedicated consultations with businesses in collaboration with the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) secretariat. Business consultations have been completed in East Africa (17 Oct 2014, Kigali, Rwanda), Eastern & Southern Africa (23 Oct 2015, Johannesburg, South Africa), and Southeast Asia (1-2 Dec 2014, Bangkok, Thailand). Additional consultations will take place in 2015.

The objective of this consultation was to identify issues, recommendations and commitments from the mobile industry to humanitarian action as a contribution to the WHS. This was the first industry-focused consultation. The WHS is intended to re-shape the global humanitarian system to be more representative of the needs and challenges of a rapidly changing world, more inclusive of the full range and diversity of humanitarian stakeholders, to build a truly global support base, and to achieve greater effectiveness.

This consultation was attended by participants from the private sector, including MNOs, other mobile industry companies and business associations (Vodafone, Smart Communications, Ericsson, Souktel, Frog, Internews, GSMA, World Economic Forum, Cellular Telephone Industry Association (CTIA)); and the humanitarian community (OCHA, World Food Programme, UNICEF, UN Global Pulse, International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC),Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) Network).

Participants discussed three themes in break-out groups:

1. Leveraging the scale and reach of the industry;
2. Communicating with communities directly affected by crisis;
3. Interoperability between the mobile and humanitarian sectors.

Participants had already been part of a process to create the Mobile Industry Humanitarian Connectivity Charter (the Charter), supported by OCHA, the Emergency Telecommunication Cluster (ETC) and the IFRC. The Charter, which was unveiled the day before, represents the industry's commitment to shared principles in support of humanitarian connectivity. The first operators to adopt the principles in the Charter were Axiata, Etisalat, Ooredoo and Smart Communications, who collectively represent more than one billion subscribers in 35 countries.

Participants received a pre-reading pack to familiarize themselves with the WHS and recent work on disaster response by the GSMA. This enabled focused discussions that built on the past achievements of the mobile industry in disaster preparedness and response, including the recent Charter, and raised issues that need to be addressed to allow the further deepening of cooperation between the humanitarian community and the mobile industry.

II. Introductory remarks and keynote address

In her opening remarks Gwi-Yeop Son, Director, Corporate Programmes, OCHA, informed participants that putting affected people at the center of humanitarian response requires an approach that considers the local context, and that innovative technology can create an enabling environment that empowers communities.

Kyla Reid, Head, Disaster Response, GSMA, reflected on the achievements and lessons of collaboration. She emphasized the importance of focusing and aligning the industry around a shared set of principles, as in the Charter.

Jacob Korenblum, CEO, Souktel, welcomed the Charter as a milestone achievement and called on MNOs to sign and implement it. He also noted that the setup of the consultation and selection of participants provided opportunities for a fruitful discussion.

III. Break-out groups discussion

Participants identified issues that the mobile industry and the humanitarian community face when engaging in humanitarian response. They provided practical recommendations for operationalizing the Charter and for galvanizing the industry towards its implementation.

Group 1: Leveraging the scale and reach of the industry
Observations and issues:
- Participants welcomed the minimum standards set in place by the Charter, but emphasized the importance of raising them going forward.
- There is a will on the side of MNOs to do more with regard to disaster response while they are united around common goals set by the Charter.
- Barriers that MNOs and the humanitarian community face in working together are seldom technical, but more related to the lack of systems and processes.

Recommendations:
- There could be more cooperation with other industries (e.g. logistics) and among MNOs (e.g. infrastructure sharing). MNOs sometimes lack the logistical capacity to quickly deliver technical equipment to areas affected by the disaster in order to establish connectivity. There is a need to coordinate more and to consider existing local capacities.
- MNOs could share good practices from field operations. An exchange of good practice might include examples of local agreements between MNOs and the humanitarian community and how they are applied before, during and after a disaster.
- Participants also recommended bringing governments, in particular the national and regional regulatory bodies, to discuss the implementation of the Charter.

Group 2: Communicating with communities (CwC) directly affected by crisis
Observations and issues:
- Participants stressed the importance of looking at CwC issues from two perspectives: communication between communities *and* humanitarian responders, and communication *within* communities themselves.
- For the purpose of communicating with affected communities, the technology is simple and is already available. There is a need to focus solutions on systems, processes and human organization behind the technical solutions.
   - Example: SMART developed an application in The Philippines which enables users to send a request for assistance. While the technological solution has been provided, SMART does not have an overview of how the app is being used and whether the receivers of this information are responding accordingly.

Recommendations:

- Humanitarian responders should be mindful of the overall objective when formulating requests for data to MNOs. MNOs are sometimes unable to share sensitive data related to their network coverage, but they can reveal relevant information for humanitarian responders if the request is formulated differently.
    - o Example: In The Philippines, MNOs were unwilling to provide data when asked about the coverage of their network. However, when the request was made to restore signals to specified areas where there were affected people, they were able to help.
- Humanitarian responders should view the digitalization of humanitarian aid as a broader issue than the provision of infrastructure and network connectivity. It entails mindset changes and effectively managing available data.
    - o Example: MNOs mentioned a case of humanitarian actors requesting from MNOs phone numbers of refugees in a camp. However, humanitarian responders could request this information directly from the refugees when they register in a camp.
- MNOs in disaster prone countries should focus on risk reduction and preparedness rather than response.
    - o Example: As part of disaster risk reduction efforts in the Philippines, local governments are required to set aside a minimum of 5 percent of their estimated revenues from regular sources to support disaster risk management activities. MNOs, and other companies, could consider adopting similar policies and conduct vulnerability mapping in advance of the disaster.

Group 3: Interoperability between the mobile and humanitarian sectors

Observations and issues:

- Participants stressed the importance of the humanitarian community and mobile industry agreeing on a common interpretation of the word 'interoperability'. Whereas the MNOs defined interoperability in a technical sense as the ability of different communication systems to exchange services, the humanitarian community defines it as the ability of various actors to work together in humanitarian response.
- The humanitarian community needs to be better coordinated when engaging with MNOs. Similar requests are received from several different UN agencies and NGOs and data provided by MNOs is poorly shared. Speaking with one voice through a single point of contact, and working in predictable ways will help build trust between the MNOs and the humanitarian community.
- Participants stressed that the humanitarian community needs to manage expectations of the network quality in the field. Humanitarian actors may arrive in crisis hit areas with mobile devices and software that are optimized for 4G networks, while the local network environment is often 2G.

Recommendations:

- Humanitarian actors and MNOs should collect examples of typical challenges MNOs can expect during a disaster when a digitally equipped humanitarian community is operating on the ground.
- To better understand the connectivity needs of the humanitarian community during and after an emergency as well as the implications of the transition to the post-emergency phase.
- Charter signatories should engage with a wide group of relevant stakeholders to build the community of Charter participants and strengthen their disaster preparedness and response activities.
- The digitalization of humanitarian aid can, in some instances, enable affected people to vocalise their needs. Assistance in the form of cash is gaining momentum as a mode of delivering humanitarian relief. Technology must, therefore, be ready to support the delivery of digital aid to people in need within 48 hours. As part of preparedness activities, the MNOs and the broader digital payments industry should map and analyse whether and where digital payments solutions can be provided and within what timeframes, otherwise humanitarian actors will continue to rely only on vouchers for delivering humanitarian assistance.

IV. Outcomes and commitments of the consultation
1. Further operationalize the Charter
2. Improve coordination with the mobile industry in humanitarian response
3. Focus activities on preparedness and risk management.

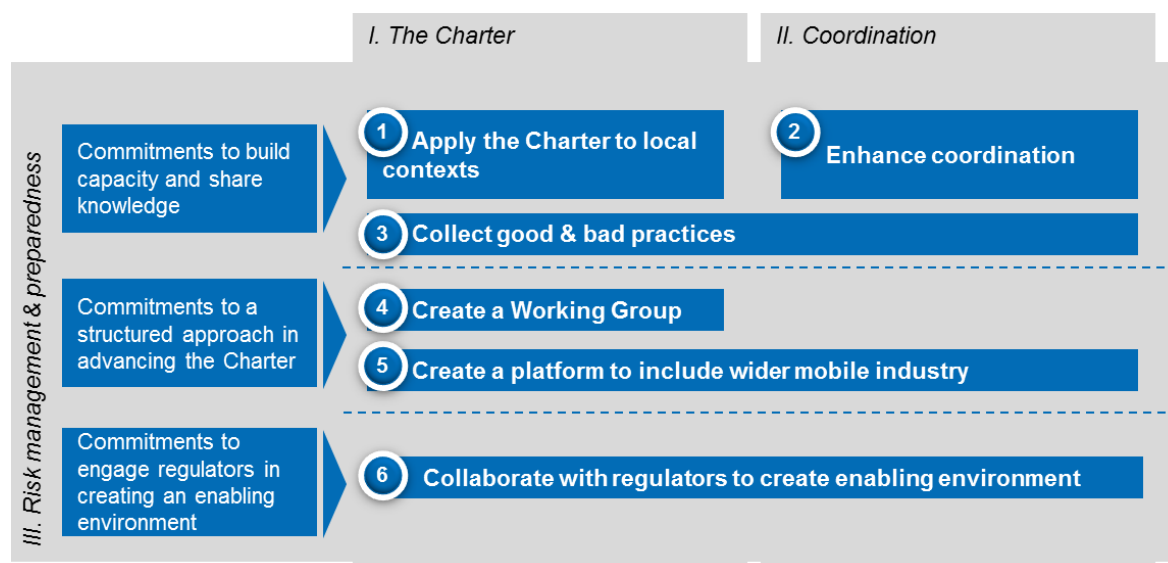Figure 1: Schematic overview of commitments along action areas

Table 1: Detailed list of commitments made at the mobile industry consultation

Action areas	Commitments	Responsible
1. Apply the Charter to local contexts	Apply the Charter to crisis affected locations and consider local issues in its implementation.	GSMA MNOs
	Prepare 3 operational pilots to support the Charter.	WFP ETC Ericsson
2. Enhance coordination	Conduct practical preparedness and risk management activities for insights into coordination issues with telecoms companies.	GSMA OCHA
	Ensure that the private sector is engaged as a humanitarian responder in a coordinated manner at all levels.	OCHA
	Ensure mechanisms and tools enable the private sector to act as part of the cluster system for coordinated response.	OCHA
	Identify processes and systems for better capturing and sharing data for humanitarian response before requesting MNOs to provide it.	OCHA
3. Collect good & bad practices	Share good & bad practices of MNOs implementing the Charter.	GSMA
	Collect good & bad practices of coordination between the humanitarian sector and the mobile industry.	OCHA (with UN agencies and NGOs)

	Prepare 10 lessons of communicating with affected communities in The Philippines.	SMART
	Promote the Charter as an example to other industries of how the private sector can engage on humanitarian emergencies.	OCHA GSMA
4. Create a Working Group	Establish a Working Group to encourage MNOs to sign the Charter and to operationalize its minimum standards, activities and principles. The Working Group will monitor how MNOs are implementing the Charter. The Working Group composition will include MNOs but its meetings will be open to other stakeholders on a needs basis.	GSMA
5. Create a platform for wider mobile industry	Create and regularly convene a platform of MNOs, humanitarian actors and the wider mobile ecosystem to ensure the Charter is entrenched in humanitarian response and in the mobile industry.	GSMA
	Analyze the availability of mobile money solutions in different countries and inform the humanitarian community.	GSMA
6. Collaborate with legislators to create enabling environment	Initiate an intergovernmental process that will encourage governments to enable operationalization of the Charter. - Discussion will be arranged to take place with governments in the margins of the next ECOSOC meeting on this issue; - Governments will be identified to act as champions of the principles in the Charter.	OCHA
	Prepare industry positions on relevant Charter provisions and engagement strategies with the regulatory bodies.	GSMA

V. Appendix

- Meeting Agenda
- Humanitarian Connectivity Charter

**Telecom industry consultation on the new humanitarian model
GSMA Disaster Response and UN OCHA
Agenda**

Tuesday 3rd March, 9.00 – 12.30
3.14c Level 1, CC3
Mobile World Congress, 2015

Objective: Leveraging the power of mobile for humanitarian response

9.00 – 9:15	**Registration & Coffee**
9:15 – 9:25	**Introductions & Objective** (Andy Andrea, Private Sector Section - OCHA)
9:25 – 9:30	**Welcome** (Gwi-Yeop Son, Director, Corporate Programmes - OCHA)
9:35 – 9:45	**The Humanitarian Connectivity Charter: Mobilising the Industry** (Kyla Reid, Head of Disaster Response - GSMA)
9:45 – 10:00	**Keynote** (Jacob Korenblum, CEO - Souktel)
10:00– 11:15	**Rising to the Challenge** (Facilitated break out groups. Participants will discuss a number of questions under each theme, led by a group facilitator)

Theme 1: Leveraging scale and reach of the industry (led by Oisin Walton, Vodafone Foundation)

- Mobile networks are vital to effective disaster preparedness and response. How can the industry continue to best leverage its technical infrastructure for the improvement of disaster preparedness and response?

Theme 2: Communicating with communities directly affected by crisis (led by Darwin Flores, SMART)

- Mobile services and connectivity can be a lifeline to those affected by disaster, and communication is ranked highly as a form of aid following disasters. How can the unique position of MNOs in this space continue to contribute to humanitarian response?

Theme 3: Interoperability of the Mobile and Humanitarian sectors (led by Brent Carbno, Ericsson Response)

- MNOs, as demonstrated through the signing of the Humanitarian Connectivity Charter are well positioned to continue building and promoting partnerships with the wider mobile community, humanitarian agencies and governments. How can we continue to build such partnerships and transform relationships between the mobile and humanitarian sectors for positive impact?

11:15 – 12:00	**Carousel debriefing** – group leaders report back with Q & A
12:00 – 12:15	**Summary, highlights** (Andy Andrea, OCHA)
12:15 – 12:25	**Strategic observations & next steps** (Gwi-Yeop Son, OCHA)
12:25 – 12:30	**Closing remarks and thanks** (Kyla Reid, GSMA)

Humanitarian Connectivity Charter

Demonstrating the Mobile Industry Commitment to Preparing for and Responding to Humanitarian Crises

Mobile networks and the connectivity they provide can be a lifeline for those affected by natural disasters and other humanitarian emergencies. The number of these crises and their impact is growing. Between 2004 and 2014, an estimated 1.8 billion people were affected by natural and complex disasters. Mobile networks facilitate both access to information and coordinate assistance with Government, NGOs and the international humanitarian community before, during and after disasters. In recognition of their crucial role, mobile network operator (MNO) members of the GSMA have defined and committed to a set of shared principles in the spirit of supporting and enhancing humanitarian connectivity.

Benefits of the Humanitarian Connectivity Charter

• The Mobile Industry can use its scale and reach positively to contribute to preparedness during disaster situations and to support the humanitarian response afterwards

• The opportunity to help is global. Our industry has prompted the increased awareness of vulnerabilities around disaster situations. The industry can foster a stronger global citizenship and engagement around disaster awareness and relief possibilities

• The Charter presents an opportunity to showcase the collaborative commitment of MNOs to their customers, communities, Government and the International Community through the humanitarian benefits of this Charter

Humanitarian Connectivity Charter Principles

The Humanitarian Connectivity Charter outlines shared principles of commitment and a series of aspirational collaborative actions to demonstrate the support of the mobile industry to communities and other stakeholders in disaster situations. The principles of this Charter are:

• To enhance coordination within and among Mobile Network Operators before, during and after a disaster

• To scale and standardise preparedness and response activities across the industry to enable a more predictable response

• To strengthen partnerships between the Mobile Industry, Government and the Humanitarian sector
The ultimate aim of the Charter is to strengthen access to communication and information for those affected by crisis in order to reduce the loss of life and positively contribute to humanitarian response

Intended Outcomes of the Humanitarian Connectivity Charter

Through pursuing the principles of The Charter, signatories will work towards the following outcomes:

• Creating accessible and resilient connectivity for mobile subscribers and communities affected by disaster situations

• Establishing before, during and after a disaster best practice standards for the mobile industry

• Reliable information sharing that will benefit communities, humanitarian responders and the mobile ecosystem

• An ability to maintain focus on business continuity and revenue protection during a disaster, enabling the delivery of critical services to impacted communities and responding agencies

• Improved leveraging of MNO core assets, competencies and relationships with external partners to deliver humanitarian communication activities

• Greater visibility of the unique role of mobile communication and the mobile industry in supporting disaster and humanitarian response

GSMA Support

The GSMA will support MNOs in the implementation of the Charter. The Principles, objectives and aspirational activities of "The Charter" are supported by The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), The UN Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. These and other interested parties will work with GSMA signatories on the adoption and implementation of The Charter activities.

Activities to Support the Humanitarian Connectivity Charter

Signatories of this Charter commit to working towards adoption of the following activities, where permissible or possible:

Before Disaster: Working towards Enhanced Internal Preparedness to Support Government and Humanitarian sectors

• Single Point of Contact (SPOC)
MNOs will nominate a single (or multiple) point(s) of contact to act as the focal point for coordinating with relevant Government agencies, humanitarian organisations and NGOs before a disaster strikes

• Information Sharing Template
MNOs will develop mechanisms to share current information about restoration activities, coverage outages and other disaster preparedness initiatives in order to create a database on preparedness

• Operator-to-Operator support
MNOs will aim to pre-identify where they may be able to contribute support to other members of the mobile eco-system should disaster strike

• Planning
MNOs will work to develop a comprehensive disaster-preparedness and/or business continuity management (BCM) plan

• Preparedness
MNOs will endeavour to participate with partners (government, humanitarian and other stakeholders) to engage in simulations or workshops to strengthen partnerships and preparedness

• Common Humanitarian Short-code
MNOs will make concerted efforts to work with regulators to identify and place on standby, a zero-rated short-code to be activated to support Humanitarian Information Services

During and following Disaster: Supporting affected communities and the Humanitarian Response sector

• Activation of Databases
Upon request by the United Nations or local authorities MNOs in affected countries, or region, the above mentioned databases and the common humanitarian short-code once established will be activated

• Supporting Access to Mobile Services
MNOs will pledge to make mobile services more accessible to those affected by humanitarian crises through provision of free or subsidized access where appropriate

• Roaming
MNOs will work together to establish agreements to enable the provision of reduced roaming tariffs for international response agencies or subscribers in emergencies abroad for a defined period of time

• External Communications
MNOs will develop a communication strategy focused on regularly informing subscribers of restoration activities