

WORLD HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT

Middle East and North Africa Regional Business Consultation

Summary Report

03 May 2015, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

INTRODUCTION

The World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) Regional Business Consultation for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) was held on 3 May 2015 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. 60 representatives from the private sector (including multi-national and national enterprises), academia, non-governmental organizations, and the United Nations from the MENA region participated in the event. The consultation was organized by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in partnership with the International Humanitarian City (IHC). The business consultation focused on private sector engagement in humanitarian action and on identifying ways in which their capacities, resources and innovations could be leveraged to overcome key challenges faced by humanitarian organizations in the region.

MAIN FINDINGS

The following key issues emerged from the discussions:

Improving understanding between humanitarian and private sector actors

- There is a need to better define who is being referred to when discussing or engaging the private sector, as different businesses, such as multinational corporations, small and medium size enterprises or Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) departments, each have different strengths and interests in terms of their engagement in humanitarian action.
- The humanitarian community needs to better clarify what is needed from businesses in terms of leveraging their capacities and support. There are many calls by the humanitarian community for the private sector to do more; yet, little detail on which businesses they are referring to and what exactly they foresee them doing in short, medium and long-term.
- The business community highlighted the need for greater clarity and information on how the humanitarian community operates in terms of roles, responsibilities and mandates, including the space for private sector engagement.

Creating platforms for dialogue and coordination

- Businesses expressed an interest in providing support to humanitarian preparedness and response, but called for better guidance from the humanitarian community, including the development of platforms that could be a center for information (“a one-stop shop”) in terms of what is needed from the private sector and opportunities for support – or what was described as private sector “entry points”.
- Humanitarian organizations also called for private sector platforms, such as Chambers of Commerce, that could help facilitate engagement with different companies that are interested in supporting humanitarian action.

Promoting sustainable partnerships

- Current partnerships tend to be ad-hoc, with businesses often called upon in the event of a crisis, rather than in advance. There were calls for a more pro-active rather than reactive approach in which formal frameworks and modalities for engagement are developed based on “prepositioned agreements.”
- Private sector companies highlighted the importance of developing sustainable partnerships, which should be distinguished from CSR activities, in that they also cater to their long-term business interests and objectives.

Creating an enabling environment

- There is a need to include governments into these discussions as they play a critical role in creating an enabling environment for private sector engagement in charity and relief work. Legislation in some countries makes it difficult for businesses to work with the UN or other entities such as NGOs.
- Bureaucratic rules and multiple due diligence procedures of the UN tend to confuse businesses and create obstacles for establishing effective and sustainable partnerships.
- Small and medium sized enterprises spoke of the obstacles they face in starting up humanitarian engagement due to difficulties in getting funding and tough governmental regulations. In addition, they face tremendous challenges in engaging with the UN and the wider humanitarian community as a result of numerous rules and regulations.
- The number of conflict related crises in the MENA region often discourages private sector engagement as they are unwilling to engage in insecure environments or fear political repercussions. Thus, some called on partnerships with the humanitarian community, in which their support is provided through the humanitarian community’s access and networks.

Thematic areas of support

- Businesses spoke of the importance of taking advantage of their individual knowledge and expertise in certain thematic areas, such as logistics, due diligence and systems of cost-efficiency. Emergency preparedness was identified as an area where the private sector offers significant technical support, including in the areas of contingency planning, data collection and analysis, risk assessments and simulation exercises.
- A platform that allows companies to showcase their strengths and assets would facilitate discussions on what businesses have to offer and how they can be leveraged for humanitarian engagement. The Regional Business Consultation was seen as one such opportunity; however, the platform needs to be a regular exercise to facilitate sustainable engagement.
- There was an emphasis on the importance of businesses simply continuing what they normally do in times of crises, as functioning markets and employment are central to affected people being able to meet their needs and strengthen their resilience.
- Private sector advocacy was identified as an area that could be developed in support of humanitarian action. For example, during discussions on addressing long-term displacement, there were calls for the private sector to encourage governments to allow refugees to work and have access to

formal employment opportunities and for countries dependent on migrant labor to facilitate the entry of refugees that have relevant skills and experience.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were discussed and promoted at the regional business consultation:

- Humanitarian actors should develop a network or small group of private sector entities in the region, including representatives from amongst the participants, to take forward the agenda of sustainable private sector engagement in humanitarian action;
- The UN should establish a regional focal point or platform/innovation hub that could act as a “one-stop shop” for businesses interested in engaging in humanitarian action in the region. This platform should also be tasked with business outreach and mapping interested companies including their areas of expertise that could be leveraged for support;
- Chambers of Commerce in crisis affected countries should seek engagement with humanitarian partners to facilitate relationships with businesses interested in supporting humanitarian action;
- Humanitarian actors should engage government entities in future dialogues and discussions with the private sector in order to facilitate an enabling environment for their business engagement;
- Interested parties should develop "prepositioned agreements" in advance on an emergency that outline and promote the engagement of specific companies during crises at the national and regional levels;
- Humanitarian actors should create a group of private sector “champions” to promote the engagement of the private sector in humanitarian response and advocate in support of humanitarian issues, including at the World Humanitarian Summit;
- Businesses involved in humanitarian action should document and disseminate best case examples of public-private sector partnerships, using succinct and simple key messages that could be used to further leverage other private sector partnerships; and
- Humanitarian actors at the consultation should follow up with the private sector participants that expressed a willingness to support and develop partnerships in the lead up to the World Humanitarian Summit. OCHA can help facilitate this engagement.

