



Online Consultation Summary Report Latin America and the Caribbean

16 March – 10 April 2015

This report summarizes the online comments and contributions received as part of the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) global online consultation for Latin America and the Caribbean. The report will inform the regional consultation meeting in Guatemala City, Guatemala on 5-7 May 2015, and be integrated into the formation of priorities for the first WHS in 2016.

About the online consultation

The moderated¹ discussion forum provided an open, public forum² to provoke debate and stimulate thinking about how to keep humanitarian action fit for the future, in order to inform the regional consultation meeting. Participation in the forum was open to anyone who registered, from any origin or location. **More than 2,800 individuals viewed the discussions and 232 comments were received in English and Spanish**, representing a broad range of countries and organizations.³

A total of nine questions were discussed, sparking lively debate around the four themes of the WHS, as well as cross-cutting issues and other topics of regional interest. The discussion questions were developed by the Discussion Chair and Moderators in consultation with the OCHA Regional Office and WHS secretariat.

Discussion Questions

Part 1 of the discussion consisted of four initial questions focused on how to make humanitarian action fit for future challenges. In part two, five follow-up questions were posted by the Chair and Moderators.

Key recommendations from the Moderators

1. Improve humanitarian actors', including government and authorities, awareness of and commitment to the **humanitarian principles**, ensuring humanitarian access, guaranteeing protection and security and community participation.
2. Establish coherent and coordinated **assessment, monitoring and evaluation** systems to: ensure appropriate needs assessment and consideration of local context, measure humanitarian impact, improve accountability and ensure adequate, accurate adjustment of interventions and strategies to ensure integrated approaches.
3. Recognize **innovation** as an important driver for improving humanitarian assistance. This requires mainstreaming multi-directional and open sharing mechanisms to enable the development of new technologies and innovative approaches by new stakeholders in addition to the existing humanitarian intuitions.

¹ The discussion took place at: www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/whs_lac, chaired by Iñigo Barrera, IFRC Pan-American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU), Panama and moderated by Jeremy Collymore, University of the West Indies, Jamaica, Simone Lucatello, Mora Institute, Mexico, Enrique Torrella Raymond, Norwegian Refugee Council, Panama and Lorena Nieto, UNHCR, Colombia.

² The discussion was publicized through a number of channels including humanitarian and development media and networks such as ReliefWeb, IRIN, United Nations (UN) agencies and NGOs, through UN Member States, social media and via emails to various humanitarian groups.

³ Comments were received from individuals, national governments, international NGOs, regional institutions, community-based organizations, research organizations, donor organizations and independent consultants, based at headquarters, regional and national offices and in the field.

Table 1: Number of comments received to each question⁴

Questions	Comments
Part 1:	
1. HUMANITARIAN EFFECTIVENESS: What is most critical to ensure that humanitarian action meets the needs of people affected by disasters and crisis in the region?	46
2. REDUCING VULNERABILITY AND MANAGEING RISK: What may be the major threats and challenges faced in the future and what are the implications of this for humanitarian preparedness and response in the region?	42
3. TRANSFORMATION THROUGH INNOVATION: Innovation is the new buzz-word. But what does it mean in the context of humanitarian action in the LAC region? Where can innovations help improve humanitarian action?	15
4. VIOLENCE AND DISPLACEMENT: What are the obstacles that humanitarian organizations face in order to accomplish their mission in the context of violence due to organized crime and gangs? How can we provide humanitarian assistance in such an environment?	60
Part 2:	
1. HUMANITARIAN EFFECTIVENESS: How can we better use information and communications technologies (ICTs) in the planning and execution of humanitarian action?	10
2. REDUCING VULNERABILITY AND MANAGING RISK: How can we improve humanitarian response to the LAC region's most recurrent disasters? In this sense, could the Cluster Approach increase the effectiveness of humanitarian action in the region?	21
3. TRANSFORMATION THROUGH INNOVATION: From your experience, what examples can you share where innovation (both technological and social) can improve humanitarian action?	25
4. VIOLENCE AND DISPLACEMENT: How can we ensure coordinated, appropriate interventions that consider different groups' specific needs, in situations of high level violence without state presence or security? What should be the role of humanitarian organizations in these contexts?	7
5. SERVING THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE IN CONFLICT: How can we integrate peacebuilding principles into humanitarian efforts in the LAC region, while still preserving the principles of impartiality and neutrality? Please share your examples.	6
Total comments:	232

Discussion Summary

Detailed summaries of the contributions to the discussion are annexed below in the interim summary and available online here: [Part 1: Weeks 1-2](#) | [Part 2: Weeks 3-4](#). The discussion engaged a diversity of humanitarian actors inclusive of intergovernmental organizations, private sector, students, activists, international NGOs and community level people.

1. Humanitarian Effectiveness

What is most critical to ensure that humanitarian action is meeting the needs of people affected by disaster and crises in the region?

The key issues that emerged called for a) humanitarian access, b) strong and enlightened leadership, c) improved coordination through prior awareness of community assets, enhanced logistics and team building through plan development and testing, d) accessible financing, e) recognition of and building upon

Humanitarian Effectiveness

Key recommendations:

1. Improve humanitarian actors' awareness of and commitment to the **principles of humanitarian action**.
2. Improve understanding of the **context** of intervention anchored in **capacity mapping** and mechanisms for accessing and sharing such data.
3. Provide a comprehensive picture of humanitarian **financing**, including assessment of the contributions of volunteers, the diaspora and local private sector.
4. Mainstream systematized mechanisms for **evaluating effectiveness** at all levels.
5. Review all humanitarian planning tools and assumptions based on the increasing number of **mega and extreme events**.

⁴ Many participants posted more than once and responded to more than one discussion question.

local/regional existing systems, f) response teams that are skilled and equipped, g) detailed and time-sensitive needs assessments.

Improved and enhanced **coordination** was suggested as perhaps the most critical emerging issue with regard to “meeting the needs of people affected by disaster and crises in this regions,” and the discussion concluded that this requires conscious action by players at all levels of the humanitarian action system.

The discussion highlighted the need for humanitarian actors to better capture available **data** and ensure that it is accessible to decision-makers. In addition to improving coordination, it was suggested that this could lead to a better understanding of the context of interventions, including potential and actual loss estimation from humanitarian crises. Participants also suggested that capacity and **capability assessments** of potential local and external partners would be of value in developing context-specific responses. Standards seem to be a relevant issue here. The online discussion also addressed the need for **scenario planning** to inform more effective action. Also underpinning the recommendations for improved coordination was the importance of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

The issue of the adequacy of **financing** of humanitarian action was also raised and elaborated in one instance. Matters addressed included the **timeliness of receipt, flexibility in use and the limited time to utilize** humanitarian funds. The idea of limiting financing to certified humanitarian organizations was also put on the table; however moderators commented that this could lead to elitism in the global humanitarian system. With the persistent call for the **use of more local communities** as the foundation of a sustainable, global humanitarian network, there will be some inevitable clashes on the philosophical and ideological dispositions herein. The moderators recommended that the matter should be placed on the table for open, transparent and equitable debate in the lead up to the WHS.

Another issue that also needs elevation in the humanitarian discourse is the challenge of “**mega**” or **extreme events**. Discussion participants pointed out that these shake the assumptions that underpin the current global humanitarian architecture and may require a revisit of existing approaches and tools.

In many respects, the discussion concluded that many of the basic actions required to improve humanitarian effectiveness are already known and agreed, but lack the commitment to bring them to implementation.

2. Reducing Vulnerability and Managing Risk

Part one of the discussion on vulnerability and risk focused on a) broad substantive questions about the major threats and challenges for the region in terms of humanitarian action and b) how innovation can be considered a tool for improving humanitarian response in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Part two tried to deepen the discussions by looking into more personal perspectives on improving humanitarian assistance in the region.

Major humanitarian threats and challenges for the region and how to address them

During Part 1 comments posted by participants ranged from identifying possible threats and challenges to humanitarian preparedness and response in the region, to the topics of **better**

Reducing Vulnerability and Managing Risk

Key recommendations:

1. **Demarcate clear responsibilities** at central and sub-governmental level to strengthen the processes of decentralization of responsibilities and resources during humanitarian action, through better and improved mechanisms for accessing and delivering resources.
2. Call for **appropriate governance**, define clear responsibilities across public and private actors and establish appropriate accountability mechanisms.
3. Strengthen **monitoring and accountability tools** to ensure better delivery and coordination of humanitarian action in the region.
4. **Improve community organizations** and their practices by innovating and testing solutions. Ensure further collaboration between stakeholders to sustain and scale-up these solutions, and to integrate them into better planning during emergencies.
5. **Engage citizens** through advocacy and public awareness as critical to stimulate social demand and define priorities to officials during and after humanitarian action.
6. **Engage Youth** as having specific needs in terms of participation in humanitarian action and education.

coordination among donors. Participants also suggested the need to address diverse issues including **fragmentation, resource mobilization and fair delivery of humanitarian assistance.** Other reflections touched upon the issue of the **role of the media** during and after emergencies. Participants pointed out that in times of conflict and humanitarian crises the media can play a double role. On one hand they serve a significant positive role in conflict situations by giving live and updated information about the situation on the ground, but it can also act as a force to cause the situation to escalate.

Many participants also called for efforts to clearly **demarkate responsibilities** at the central and sub governmental level (such as provincial, district or municipal levels) to strengthen the processes of decentralization of responsibilities and resources during humanitarian action, through better and improved mechanisms for accessing and delivering resources.

A crucial issue raised was the call for **appropriate governance**, defined as the system of norms, institutions and interactions that determine how decisions are made and enforced for humanitarian action. Participants suggested that this issue should be put at the core of the international debate for the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. Commenters also pointed out the need to identify gaps and challenges related to the definition of **clear responsibilities** across public and private actors and the establishment of appropriate **accountability mechanisms.**

Participants suggested that **monitoring and accountability instruments** should be emphasized as a means to improve delivery and coordination of humanitarian assistance in the region. Participants pointed out that the inherent diversity of practices and responses within the region is in itself a resource but thought that some common standards must be agreed. Another general point that came out of the discussion is that there is no need to seek to develop new legal standards, but rather to build consensus among stakeholders on the elements of a humanitarian agenda, the outcomes of which may be taken up at domestic, regional and global levels and lead to new laws, soft law instruments or binding agreements for humanitarian action.

Related to this, the discussion emphasized the importance of **coordination**, which implies the use of policy instruments to deliver humanitarian assistance in a cohesive and effective manner, rather than in working in an ad hoc way. To reduced vulnerability and manage risk, those instruments include strategic planning, gathering data and managing information. Resource mobilization is also a key part.

The discussion also highlighted that **citizens' engagement** through advocacy and public awareness is critical to stimulate social demand and define priorities to officials during and after humanitarian action. Current developments in information and communications technologies (ICTs) are engaging and informing citizens and connecting people between individuals and communities at all levels. Systematic efforts to include these tools in humanitarian efforts promise to deliver accelerated results. **Youth** were also singled out as having specific needs in terms of participation in humanitarian action and education.

Participants also highlighted that **international cooperation actors**, particularly bilateral and multilateral donors and NGOs, have a key role in supporting national-level mechanisms to implement more flexible, integrated humanitarian relief programmes.

In response to the Moderator's question of whether the **Cluster Approach** could increase the effectiveness of humanitarian action in the region, participants noted that it has already proved effective, suggesting that it is a worthwhile mechanism to pursue. However, they also cautioned that there are many challenges associated with the approach that must be revised and improved.

Another point raised by participants was the issue of **available supplies**, not only during the stage of preparation for an emergency but also during the acquisition, survey, identification and locating of supplies for community relief. It was suggested that various suppliers, both locally and across geographic regions, must engage to

contribute to disaster management. On this subject, one participant called for surveying and including a wide range of products and services that are useful for humanitarian action.

3. Transformation through Innovation

How innovation can improve humanitarian response in the region

Part one of the discussion on innovation focused on how innovation can be considered a tool for improving humanitarian response in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Part two tried to deepen the discussions by sharing successful good practices in innovation for humanitarian response in the region.

The discussion highlighted how, within the humanitarian sector, innovation is often understood as a material product or is associated with physical technologies, where the ‘innovation’ label can be linked to a concrete material outcome. However, examples of innovation can include transformation processes, such as promoting inclusion, participation and fostering self-reliance within communities. It can also include open participation in important decision-making processes like the WHS online consultation platform.

Several mechanisms and operational areas were identified and shared among participants about the role of innovation and how it can be successfully implemented. One element that emerged strongly is the need for **clear innovation instruments**. Participants felt that humanitarian innovation in fact falls into the institutionalised practice of a small number of humanitarian actors which focus on upward accountability to donors and traditionally take a more ‘top-down’ approach to implementing solutions for affected populations. They emphasised that it is also important to build new ‘bottom-up’ practices to improve humanitarian innovation and seek new ways forward to address the challenge of innovation by including different stakeholders.

Participants pointed out that in the region, **community organizations** are also improving their practices and are already innovating and testing solutions. In order to sustain and scale-up these solutions, and to integrate these into better planning during emergencies, further collaboration between stakeholders must be properly addressed.

Recognizing innovation as an important driver for improving humanitarian effectiveness in the region, there were calls for an **integrated approach** that embraces **disaster risk reduction** practices and better **local management** for humanitarian action. Some participants called specifically for the development of action plans that include innovation practices to be matched with national development planning exercises in order to mainstream humanitarian responses.

Other innovation tools proposed during the discussion include **better risk maps**, which are increasingly used more often and more effectively in LAC. They are a tool for disaster risk management that contributes to

Transformation through Innovation

Key Recommendations:

1. **Recognize innovation as an important driver** for improving humanitarian assistance in the region. There were calls for an integrated approach that embraces disaster risk reduction practices and better local management for humanitarian assistance.
2. **Explore existing innovation instruments.** Humanitarian innovation falls into the institutionalized practice of a small number of humanitarian actors, and which focuses on upwards accountability to donors and traditionally takes a more ‘top-down’ approach in implementing solutions for affected populations;
3. **Build new ‘bottom-up’ practices** for improving humanitarian innovation and seek approaches to address the challenge of innovation by including different stakeholders.
4. **Develop action plans that include innovation practices** to be matched with national development planning exercises in order to mainstream humanitarian responses.
5. **Increase the network of available supplies during the emergency**, not only during the preparation stage but also during the acquisition, survey, identification and locating of supplies for community relief.
6. **Professionalize the sector** that leads to the development of core competencies in humanitarian work, which can then form the basis of targeted knowledge transfer and skills development.

identifying the threats and dangers for a community, a region, a country, a supranational region and its vulnerabilities.

Innovation can also include the effort to **professionalize the sector** that leads to the development of core competencies in humanitarian work, which can then form the basis of targeted knowledge transfer and skills development.

4. Violence and Displacement

In part one of the discussion, participants discussed the obstacles that humanitarian organizations face in order to accomplish their mission in the context of violence due to organized crime and gangs and how to provide humanitarian assistance. In part two, participants looked at how to ensure coordinated, appropriate interventions that consider different groups' specific needs, in situations of high level violence without state presence or security, and the role of humanitarian organizations.

Participants raised relevant issues regarding i) protection gaps and humanitarian needs in urban contexts; ii) challenges in the identification of emerging armed groups associated with generalized violence and organized crime, iii) sustainability, and iv) humanitarian workers' role and work conditions in volatile contexts.

Participants discussed the ways in which urban contexts are a challenge for humanitarian interventions. They felt that communities face social and territorial control from diverse armed groups who impose this control through intimidation and terror strategies such as dispossession of houses, sexual harassment and violence, forced recruitment, war taxes, threats, curfews and public punishments. The discussion also highlighted how the humanitarian space has reduced. Participants cautioned that humanitarian organizations' presence can negatively impact affected communities, sharing the example of Honduras where armed groups have imposed taxes to authorize the entry of humanitarian organizations, posing a new dilemma for compliance with humanitarian principles.

Participants raised how the lack of recognition of these armed groups by governments or even other humanitarian actors presents an obstacle for advocacy strategies that aim to address the discussion from a humanitarian perspective about the impact of violence in communities regardless of the characteristics of the perpetrator as established in International Humanitarian Law. In many countries in the region governments have decided to address these groups as common delinquency, limiting a comprehensive interpretation in accordance with international legal frameworks. Protection is then reduced and situations like forced displacement and forced recruitment are made invisible.

Participants also felt that the accuracy of interventions in these contexts is compromised, since the involvement of affected communities in the design and implementation could raise their exposure to risk. The identification of specific needs requires presence, trust-building, and time; these aspects are limited in high control areas and

Violence and Displacement

Key Recommendations

1. Ensure coordinated, articulated and complementary interventions in compliance with **humanitarian principles**, as well as transparency and information sharing that prioritizes humanitarian needs over specific agendas.
2. Approach **structural causes** to prevent new risk scenarios, reduce vulnerability and ensure government ownership and leadership: Although emergency response is necessary, it should be a phase in the medium-long term action to tackle structural causes, whether in development or humanitarian interventions.
3. **Avoid standardized interventions** that ignore existing capacities, communities' needs and armed actors' interests, capacities and profiles. Lack of community-based approaches jeopardizes the impact and security conditions for humanitarian workers and affected people.
4. **Strengthen selection processes** in humanitarian organizations to ensure sensitivity, neutrality, respect and commitment to humanitarian principles and codes of conduct and improve staff security and wellness procedures.
5. Promote **coordinated advocacy strategies** towards regional governmental mechanisms to address humanitarian and protection needs, to technically assist the design and implementation of programmes and projects that address structural causes and ensure compliance with international and regional instruments and legal frameworks.

low institutional presence. Without the direct participation of communities interventions create dependence, weaken their own protection and resistance mechanisms, and affect sustainability. All of this, in the long run, could represent closure of the humanitarian space.

The discussion highlighted how humanitarian workers' roles in such contexts are challenged. Compliance with humanitarian principles is a must, in addition to coordinating with development actors in order to prevent duplication, overlapping and contradiction. Mainstreaming protection perspectives in all interventions can define not only the maintenance of humanitarian space, but the lives of humanitarian workers and affected communities.

Comments on this report are welcomed. Please post online at: www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/whs_lac or send to: lac@whsummit.org.

Detailed summaries of the contributions to the discussion can be found in the interim summaries annexed below and available online here: [Part 1: Weeks 1-2](#) | [Part 2: Weeks 3-4](#).

This report was drafted by the Discussion Chair and Moderators with support from the WHS secretariat, OCHA LAC Regional Office and UN Online Volunteers: Christelle Cazabat (France), Lyndall King (UK), Tina Mason (UK) and Maira Belén Vásquez (Argentina).

Disclaimer: the findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed in this discussion summary report are those of the participants and do not necessarily reflect the policies or views of the World Humanitarian Summit secretariat, UNOCHA, the United Nations or the participants' organizations.

Annex 1

Weekly Summary: Weeks 1-2

16-29 March 2015

The following summarises the comments posted during Part One of the discussion in response to the four initial questions.

PART 1: Q. 1. What is most critical to ensure that humanitarian action meets the needs of those affected by disasters and crises in the region?

Jeremy Collymore, the discussion moderator, opened the discussion by asking what is required of tools, systems and structures in the face of a changing hazard landscape in the region in order to meet the needs of those affected by disasters and crisis.

Joanne Persad, Programme Manager, Preparedness and Response, Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) (Barbados), together with several other participants, suggested better and enhanced data sharing, synergy and coordination amongst national actors, regional institutions and international players. Information sharing and dialogue would reduce duplication and associated problematic outcomes, *“There is a plethora of agencies currently conducting damage and needs assessments on post impacts. The data is sometimes neither shared nor consolidated and what emerges is a distorted picture of the extent of impact, the level of damage and a misguided analysis of loss.”* (Joanne Persad, Barbados).

Achieving improved coordination would call for ongoing training, the respect for both individual agency as well as shared mandates and to particularly emphasise national leadership including prioritising and supporting the reestablishment of national coordination where it has been broken or diminished in crisis situations. **Philmore Mullin, National Office of Disaster Services (Antigua and Barbuda)** agreed, advising that, *“agencies need to work with and through the impacted state system and not push their own agenda.”* For **Claudio Providas, UNDP (Bolivia)** and **Nicolás Dorrnsoro, Teacher (Uruguay)**, effective leadership would improve coordination amongst stakeholders. Better coordination also requires the collection of stakeholder baseline data.

Milton, Independent Consultant (Costa Rica) and others participants emphasised the need for credible and transparent agencies. Milton added the need to close the gap between needs and actual resources using support from public or private donors. For **Virginia Herzig, National Consultant on Emergencies and Disasters, Organización Panamericana de Salud (OPS/OMS) (Guatemala)** the question of needs and resources includes scenarios where, in the haste to provide assistance, inappropriate inputs are sometimes delivered. For **Luis, Consultant, INDECI (Peru)** it is also dependent on the adequacy of preparedness and pre-positioning. **Lina Villa, Health in Emergencies Officer, IFRC (Colombia)** recommended involving local community leaders in order to adapt assistance to local contexts. **Miguel Angel Cruz, Public Health Specialist, Florida International University (USA)** further noted that learning about communities needs to happen pre-crisis and appropriate assistance therefore rests on the quality of the partnership with local counterparts. Participants also discussed the role of local communities in preparedness and response, some recognising that they may often be first responders with

others cautioning that this depends on the resources available to them, which should not be assumed. Others highlighted the contributions of affected individuals themselves, such as bringing their own resources to evacuation centres.

Camilo Vega, Access to Information, OCHA (Peru) raised the role and importance of information management in order to develop threat scenarios, contingency plans, prepositioning, gap filling plans and provider identification. **Luis Angel Jimenez Carcamo, DRR and Community Education Specialist, Red Cross (Costa Rica)** adds that information should include standard community-held resources to enable better diagnosis of disaster impact and restoration plans. **Lan Zou, mathematician and statistician, University of Washington (USA)** recommended a big data system approach linking experts from different response areas. Furthering this **Vijay Datadin, GIS Specialist, Caribbean GIS (Guyana)**, added that big spatial data should include information on infrastructure and that whilst this data might already exist, it is not always readily available and open.

Hani Mutlaq, Organizational Development, Iraqi Red Crescent Society (Iraq) advised that assessments need to be developed according to the nature of the disaster, with conflict scenarios not necessarily settling fast enough for certain types of assessments, rapid response methods in these instances are required and **Miguel Angel Cruz (USA)** recommends assessments be developed in coordination with others and lead to short and long-term response forecasting. **Francisco Reyna, Programme Officer, Norwegian Church Aid (Guatemala)** adds that it is also important to focus on the quality of information including how well it represents all affected groups, which another participant highlighted should include persons with disabilities).

According to **Xavier, Director, America's Zone, IFRC (Panama)** the most critical discussion is the guarantees of humanitarian space and access at all times. Also important is the participation of affected populations in decision-making process, including the preparatory process, which calls for listening and context awareness, as well as donor and funding mechanism flexibility. Participants advised that flexibility is hampered by the need to spend money in short timeframes due to often short-term financing of international appeals. Xavier proposed overcoming this by agreeing new timeframes, advocating with the donor community and opening up unrestricted funding to certified aid agencies. **Alejandro Zurita, Country Director, Associated Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (Nicaragua)** emphasizes that this should be addressed in order to reassert the partnership aspect of the relationship between donors and responders. **Philmore Mullin (Antigua and Barbuda)** highlighted that addressing the needs of the poor and vulnerable groups prior to disasters would remove a large dimension of the impact afterwards.

The moderator posed a further question to participants, asking whether existing preparedness and response programmes would enable the delivery of more timely and appropriate victim services? In response, **Miguel Angel Cruz** suggested a phased response based on a timeline of provision needs aligned with suitable agencies for each phase. Responders able to provide the first phase of basic needs would be better positioned and prepared by being in closer proximity to certain areas, or in some cases even having a country presence.

One participant, **Oscar A. Gomez, Research Fellow, JICA Research Institute (Japan)** asked how critical the humanitarian aid discussion is in the region. Noting Ebola as an example of the region's involvement in humanitarian responses in other regions he questioned whether there are major gaps in Latin America and the Caribbean that are as of now unfilled?

Q. 2. What may be the major threats and challenges faced in the future and what are the

implications of this for humanitarian preparedness and response in the region?

More than forty comments were posted in response to this question, highlighting current threads and challenges and exploring its consequences for humanitarian preparedness and response to disasters in the region. Most participants were based in Southern and Central America, with heated debates from Brazil and Mexico, and additional expert voices from the US, Japan and Kenya.

The **main challenges** identified included:

- Current deficiencies in planning and preparedness
- Impact of global issues, such as climate change, migration and inequality
- Financial burden imposed by international institutions (the IMF and the World Bank)
- Lack of response from international donors and global communities abroad.

The regional context is described as affected by the rapid growth of **urbanization**, the lack of integrated urban and territorial **planning for disaster-prevention, non-sustainable exploitation of natural resources, accountability**, multidimensional indicators that define and help tackle **extreme social inequality and vulnerability**, and lack of access to clean **water**.

The **main threats** are defined in the online debate as the lack of governmental response to emergencies, whose concern for public opinion leads to the refusal of international help. The underpinning context of violence and organized crime linked to global drug trafficking is key for most commentators and deemed worse for citizens than in times of civil wars.

Current political and social instability with fragile economies is cited among the main threads. While in micro perspective, many point out to externalities than hinder the process of better deliveries during disasters. Lack of effective local planning for humanitarian emergencies is seen as a consequence of political and governmental weakness.

The moderator summarized the main issues raised in the first two weeks of discussions as coordination, fragmentation, the importance of cohesion and the double role of media, which can provide live, updated information about the situation on the ground but can also act as a force to cause the situation to escalate.

Proposals to find solutions include the [Nansen Initiative on Cross-border Movement in Disasters](#), which **Juan C. Méndez, Advisor, Nansen Initiative (Costa Rica)**, recommended should be managed comprehensively, requiring: 1) Integrated Risk Management: Prevention and Preparedness for displacement; 2) Migration and border disaster management, 3) Protection during the cross-boundary movements, 4) Sustainable solutions and 5) International coordination and cooperation for cross-border movements in disaster contexts.

“The proposal of an INTEGRAL HUMANITARIAN PLATFORM (PHI), aims to combine the political, institutional, regulatory and operational aspects of all disaster-management procedures, with risk maps showing the concurrence of disasters in certain areas and, then, act accordingly in advance.

**- Carlos Alberto Villalba,
Journalist, Argentina**

PART 1: Q. 3. Innovation is the new buzz-word. But what does it mean in the context of humanitarian action in the LAC region? Where can innovations help improve humanitarian action?

Part one of the discussion on innovation in humanitarian action involved participants from Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru, the USA and others. **Simone Lucatello, Discussion Moderator (Mexico)**, initiated the discussion by reminding participants of the global consensus on the use of innovative methods to improve humanitarian action and of the variety of areas covered by the notion of innovation. Comments embraced this variety and focused primarily on the following three types of innovation to support humanitarian action:

1. Technological innovation: **Xavier, IFRC (Panama)** suggested creating a platform to be used by all interested stakeholders to share information on innovations and possibly replicate them in other settings. New information technologies not only provide resources for innovation but can also help share these innovations with others. **Norlang Garcia (Mexico)** highlighted the potential of geographic information systems (GIS) to identify affected communities more precisely and better determine their requirements ahead of crises. **Paula Isturiz, UNDP LAC Regional Centre (Panama)** shared a number of examples including the [Humanitarian Data Exchange](#) (HDX) led by OCHA, and [Point Clouds](#), 3D models that are obtained using aerial imagery, transforming 2D images into 3D models. This supports humanitarian response by providing a full visualization of all angles of, e.g. a neighbourhood following an earthquake, enabling improved situation analysis, which can lead to better decision-making.
2. Social innovation: **Simone** invited participants to comment not only on technological innovations but also on social innovations, such as promoting inclusion, participation and self-reliance amongst communities. **Xavier** suggested that innovation must keep people and communities in mind at all times in order to make a difference. Enabling the participation of communities in decision-making processes through capacity-building and innovative consultation methods can be one way to do that. **May Huntington (USA)** and **Carlos Roberto Miralda Herrera (Honduras)** both referred to educational innovations to improve the results of humanitarian action, either through academic curricula or training on topics such as civil and military relations, understanding mass violence, forced migration or GIS. **May** also suggested fostering regional economic integration, mutual defence and political unity in LAC region with a focus on data revolution.
3. Organizational innovation: According to **Camilo Vega (Peru)**, methods used by humanitarian actors could themselves benefit from change, notably in terms of accountability, where more transparency and participation should be encouraged to follow-up on results. The way humanitarian actors share information could also be improved, by making meetings more didactic and efficient and by developing user-friendly

“Innovation means a lot of things: it implies changes in humanitarian organizations, shifting paradigms among humanitarian workers, involving technology and proposing new marketing and strategies for potential donors. But innovation can also mean to be better prepared for the age of risk.” – Simone Lucatello, Discussion Moderator, Instituto Mora, Mexico

“Embracing new technologies, crowdsourcing solutions, tapping into collective knowledge of Digital Humanitarians are fundamental innovative elements to allow for better humanitarian response in our region.” - Paula Isturiz, UNDP LAC Regional Centre, Panama

knowledge management systems. **Xavier** highlighted the importance of building on existing experiences and knowledge to improve humanitarian action. This requires open access to information for all, for example through new information technologies. He also emphasized the need to incorporate ideas and solutions from other sectors to expand the range of tools available to adapt to problems more efficiently.

Part 1 Q. 4. VIOLENCE AND DISPLACEMENT: What are the obstacles that humanitarian organizations face in order to accomplish their mission in the context of violence due to organized crime and gangs? How can we provide humanitarian assistance in such an environment?

In Part 1 of the discussion on violence and displacement received 20 comments from Colombia, Costa Rica, Panama, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and others, looking at two main issues: 1) obstacles faced by humanitarian organizations in fulfilling their mission in the context of violence due to organized crime and gangs, and 2) how to provide humanitarian assistance in the face of such obstacles.

1. Obstacles faced by humanitarian organizations:

A. Structural and political factors of the environment in which they operate: **Xavier, IFRC (Panama)** pointed out three structural obstacles that affect the work of humanitarian agencies in contexts where gangs or organized crime groups operate. On one hand, the high level of inequality that exists in the region, an element that lead to new forms of social protection provided by the various organized groups or gangs, to which must be added the marginalization and stigmatization suffered by these groups, which limits their opportunity to become actors of behaviour change. Another factor stated was the “political” one; in fact **Kris (Trinidad and Tobago)** highlighted that political factors may determine the outcome of a given situation.

B. Lack of available information on the context and the resulting unpreparedness of humanitarian workers:

Milton (Costa Rica) highlighted the lack of information on the legal framework and on the context in which humanitarian action occurs. This constitutes an obstacle that affects the ultimate success of the mission and humanitarian workers’ performance due to insufficient information on previous training. Thus, humanitarian action must be adapted to the specific context and to the particular humanitarian issues that will be dealt with. **Xavier (Panama)** gave three examples of Red Cross approaches to so-called “red areas” (the cases of Honduras, Haiti and Guatemala), examples that demonstrate the need to know and understand the context specificity as well as the preparation of humanitarian aid agencies and personnel for access to these areas.

“The humanitarian assistance in this environment requires organizations with high level of credibility and acceptance (...) that demonstrate (...) their capacity to perform their duties aligned with the fundamental principles for humanitarian assistance, and more specially, that are capable to defend with their actions, the principle of Impartiality.” -

**Xavier, Director, America's Zone, IFRC,
Panama**

2. How to provide humanitarian assistance in such an environment:

Participants raised the need to combine the humanitarian approach with the development approach as violence is a consequence of structural problems in society, such as inequality, marginalization and stigmatization, among others. In response, participants highlighted the need for humanitarian organizations and personnel to earn high levels of credibility and acceptance from the society where they are providing assistance. This requires paying

attention to the perception of the organization that the population and the different groups have, because to earn the space requires trust.

Participants also stressed that in order to launch more effective humanitarian interventions, an environmental assessment should be undertaken and the economic, material and human resources required identified.

Annex 2

Weekly Summary: Weeks 3-4

30 March – 12 April 2015

The following summarises the comments posted during Part 2 of the discussions in response to five new questions.

PART 2: Q. 1 How can we better use information and communications technologies (ICTs) in the planning and execution of humanitarian action?

Jeremy Collymore, University of the West Indies, the discussion moderator, introduced the second part of the discussion on humanitarian effectiveness in the region which looked at how ICTs can be better used in future to improve humanitarian effectiveness in the region. Participants agreed that ICTs should be used to facilitate timely coordination and open information sharing among all actors and agencies and to provide information in advance of an emergency. **Carlos Alberto Villalba, psychologist and journalist (Argentina)**, proposed an ‘Integral Humanitarian Platform’ based on three combined data sets: Geographical and Political Space, Policy, and Operations, complemented by risk maps to support emergency and disaster response. **May Huntington, Retired Administrator and University Lecturer (USA)**, suggested that ICTS be used to benefit affected communities, both in terms of coordinated communications from partnered agencies as well as enabling an accountability channel for feedback and complaints.

Dante Torres, Chief of the General Office of Risk Management (Peru), recommended that when ICTs are introduced, context-specific institutional specificities should be taken into consideration in order for the technologies to be used most effectively, and be accompanied by capacity-building activities. **Camilo Vega, Humanitarian Information Management Specialist, OCHA (Peru)**, added that attitude change towards the adoption of new technologies by humanitarian workers is imperative for take-up and success. **Savani Jayasooriya (Sri Lanka)** added that the role of the affected communities should also be considered to facilitate the adoption of ICTs, suggesting that ICTs have the potential, through enabling swift digital communication, to prepare and transform civilians into first responders able to a certain extent to organise, coordinate and respond to an emergency.

Gerald Kihara, Student and Humanitarian Activist (Kenya), highlighted the role of ICTS in disseminating information, in particular via social media networks and **Laura Isidean, Digital Advocate (Canada)**, shared the example of supplying smartphones with pre-loaded applications (‘apps’) to first responders.

Some points of caution were contributed by **Nobuyuki Asai, SGI (Japan)**, noting the importance of reliable and verifiable information and being aware of barriers to accessing ICTs faced by some population groups. Giving the example of the 2011 Japanese earthquake, information disseminated tended not to reach the **elderly**, due to their typically lower use of ICTs, and foreigners due to language barriers. Thus it is essential to consider and include excluded and vulnerable groups when devising ICT strategies.

PART 2: Q. 2. How can we improve the humanitarian response to the most frequent disasters in the region?

Simone Lucatello, Discussion Moderator, encouraged participants to share concrete, experience-led comments on how best to improve humanitarian response to recurring disasters in the region, thinking within the context of the Cluster Approach.

There was general consensus that the region predominately faces **small-scale disasters which are not adequately addressed** in the short and long term. These disasters constantly recur and lose out on national and global planning and funding as they are below [L3 categorisation](#), the UN classification for the most severe, large-scale humanitarian crises. **Lucy Pearson, Advocacy Coordinator, Global Network of CSOs for Disaster Reduction (GNDR) (UK)** highlighted the impact of small-scale disasters, citing a GNDR report that found that 90% of respondents prioritised small-scale, recurrent disasters. GNDR has created an [open-source database](#) collected from CSOs in the region, in order to inform response DRR planning.

“Drawing on [this] local knowledge is essential if these small-scale everyday recurrent disasters are to be addressed.”

- **Lucy Pearson, Advocacy Coordinator, Global Network of CSOs for Disaster Reduction (GNDR) (UK)**

Honest communication and shared, standardised data adapted to the cluster approach of defining division of labour among organisations and providing a platform for agreement on approaches was a theme highlighted by most participants. **Camilo Vega (Peru)** recommended that humanitarian actors build trust with governments to ensure they no longer hide limited capacity for fear of appearing weak. **Getro Mathieu, Manager, Action Secours Ambulance, (Haiti)** recommended stronger communication platform/s connecting *all* actors to empower Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) and enable them to be more involved. Referring to personal experience in the field, **Carlos Cano, Lieutenant Colonel, Ecuadorian Army (Ecuador)** sees duplication of some responses and absence of others, due to a *“lack of adequate inventory of resources,”* pointing to the need for an ambitious, overarching, multinational database spanning military through to local governments.

“Establishing trust and communication tools long beforehand will help with effectiveness when the hour of need is at hand” - **Daphne Cothren, Architect and Green Building**

Supporting these complex databases and other effective programmes requires **stronger partnerships with the private sector**, and **May Huntington (USA)** was one of a few participants to discuss this, outlining the responsibility of the private sector to serve the vast LAC population as well as benefit from it, suggesting that symbiosis could be achieved with tax incentives for training, technology and expertise sharing, among others. **Jamel Ben Abdallah, Sorbonne University (France)** cited the International Charter on Space and Major Disasters as a good example of collaboration between corporate, national and humanitarian actors.

The need to better address climate change as a root cause of humanitarian crises in the region was highlighted by a number of participants. In line with the cluster approach, **Nerline, Student, International Development (UK)** felt that NGO-created screening tools that provide early environmental warnings could be unlocked for use by trained local actors who can build their *own* capacity, *“If humanitarian organisations see themselves not just as givers of aid but as agents who are proactive in information gathering and capacity building in issues such as climate change, their response to disasters can be greatly enhanced.”* And **Mauricio López Dardaine, Independent Consultant (Argentina)**, discussed the idea that improved environmental awareness – beginning at the grassroots – will filter up to corporate and government levels. Greater enforcement of climate change targets and industry responsibility is also necessary, tying in with increased **accountability** from all actors – another issue emphasized by participants throughout this consultation.

In addition to environmental accountability, **Carlos Esteban Mejia, Humanitarian Professional, Oxfam America (USA)** suggested that general **accountability spanning local organisations through to donors** *“needs operational mechanisms to be useful”*.

Helena, OCHA (Switzerland) highlighted a specific area for logistical improvement: **the simplification of customs procedures**, where over-complex bureaucratic regulations hinder the timely delivery of humanitarian aid and assistance. Training aid organisations to better understand national customs rules or working with government to simplify aid delivery routes could support this improvement.

Carlos Esteban Mejia, Oxfam America emphatically highlighted a perceived **inability of the humanitarian community to learn and change**, despite efforts to improve this – and failure to put **aid recipients at the centre of humanitarian planning and response**, pointing out issues such as duplication, distance between agencies and field workers and lack of local consultation. **Marliza, Board Member, Cuenca Cantonal Board for Protection of Rights, Ecuador** feels humanitarian agencies sometimes lack consideration and consistency, *“when an emergency occurs, we are almost starting from zero.”*

“I worry that the WHS will continue to create new systems, new architectures and put aside defining fundamentally humanitarian responses: the human imperative. We must take people seriously; allow their own voices to be heard, not speak for them.” - Carlos Esteban Mejia, Oxfam America

PART 2: Q. 3. From your experience, what examples can you share where innovation (both technological and social) can improve humanitarian action?

In Part two of the discussion on innovation in humanitarian action, participants were invited to share concrete recommendations from their field experiences. Nearly thirty comments were shared by participants from Argentina, Bangladesh, Canada, Ecuador, Grenada, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Peru, Somalia, Uganda, Uruguay and the USA highlighting a variety of issues, including:

Innovative mapping technologies: Several participants highlighted the potential of using new technologies to improve mapping as a tool for both prevention and assistance, pre and post disasters. **Carlos Alberto**

“Innovation goes beyond the technological label and includes transformation processes, like promoting inclusion, participation and fostering self-reliance amongst communities and other interesting forms of action.” – Simone Lucatello, Discussion Moderator, Mexico

Villalba, Psychologist, National University of Rosario (Argentina) pointed out that mapping tools can be used pre-emptively to identify threats and vulnerabilities which might affect communities and enable better preparation and distribution of resources for future responses. Mapping tools can also help development, for example by avoiding building in at-risk areas. The use of drones to facilitate mapping was mentioned by several participants.

Preventive strategies and policies: **Gustavo Sosa, Researcher, Mora Institute (Mexico)** suggested that the development and implementation of preventive policies on natural disasters and social issues should be mandatory, and climate change should be considered as a priority by policy-makers. **May Huntington (USA)** recommended that countries mainstream natural disaster response into legislation, policies, funding, building codes and infrastructure and insurance plans for post-disaster needs.

Private sector involvement: **Viviana Ines Arias, Advisor, International Relations, ProCordoba Agency (Argentina)** suggested creating a database of potential suppliers of both goods and services needed in emergencies. This would be particularly useful in the LAC region as many emergencies occur at local level and require the intervention of small and medium-sized enterprises as philanthropic contributors and commercial suppliers.

Youth involvement: **Jaimie, Lab Manager/Student, University of North Carolina (USA)** shared an innovative humanitarian project designed by a university student which was not implemented due to lack of incentives. He suggested creating programmes to encourage students to develop innovative ideas to support humanitarian action.

ICTs: **Gerald Kihara, Student/Youth Activist, Kenya Red Cross Society (Kenya)** highlighted the usefulness of social media to share critical information with the public but cautioned that it should be used in a timely manner. **Abdulatif Omar, Norwegian Refugee Council (Somalia)** shared his experience using mobile phones to collect data and manage money distribution more efficiently in an emergency.

Beyond technological innovation: **David Weatherill, International Technical Advisor, Centre for Affordable Water & Sanitation Technology (CAWAST) (Canada)** pointed out that projects can be innovative without involving advanced technologies, for example safe water supply mechanisms such as Biosand, ceramic or membrane filters, which provide affordable, scalable solutions to meet the basic needs of affected populations. **'Entrenador' (Uruguay)** highlighted that games and sports can be used to improve social work in crises, particularly with children and youth.

PART 2 Q. 4. VIOLENCE AND DISPLACEMENT: How can we ensure coordinated, appropriate interventions that consider different groups' specific needs, in situations of high level violence without state presence or security? What should be the role of humanitarian organizations in these contexts?

In the second part of the discussion on the theme of 'Violence and Displacement', relatively few comments (8) were received from participants from at least four countries – Colombia, El Salvador, Spain, the USA and Honduras – addressing and providing concrete proposals on providing appropriate humanitarian interventions in contexts of high violence with low state presence and security. Three participants – **May Huntington (USA)**, **Ernesto Magaña, Global Alliances, Fundación Ayuda en Acción (Honduras)** and **Daniel, Humanitarian**

Coordinator, Save the Children (Colombia) – emphasized the need for joint regional responses to human rights violations.

Médecins du Monde shared their experience in **El Salvador**, emphasizing the importance of partnering with other organizations, prioritizing interventions in people and individuals, rather than structures, in order to avoid being manipulated by interested groups, and ensuring unity among all humanitarian organizations, creating formal exchange spaces and positions.

May highlighted the existing responsibility of "brother" countries in the region to prevent human rights violations committed in another state where it fails to prevent such atrocities, proposing establishing a committee to adopt guidelines and definitions of humanitarian intervention. Similarly **Ernesto Magaña (Honduras)** called for joint, united action by all humanitarian actors, suggesting the construction in each country of a mechanism of protection and response against security incidents. Finally, **Daniel (Colombia)** recommended that when problems or security incidents occur, there must be a common position and joint and forceful response by the entire humanitarian community that could be used by different actors. In response, **Lorena Nieto, UNHCR (Colombia)**, the discussion moderator, shared concrete examples of regional governmental efforts such as UNASUR, the Andean Parliament, among others, through which governments in the region have tried to meet to discuss key issues.

Additionally, it was emphasized by both **Menna S. Abraha, Action Against Hunger (Spain)** and **Daniel** that to facilitate interventions in insecure contexts it is essential to ensure strict compliance to 'humanitarian principles' by all humanitarian organizations.

"This is especially felt in contexts where there is no declared war (the case of Central America) [...] It is this violence which requires greater recognition by all as a factor that is itself decreasing humanitarian space, and by not recognizing it as a structural problem, states also threaten humanitarian interventions." - **Médecins du Monde, El Salvador**

"Incidence strategies to address existing mechanisms for governmental coordination and agreements in the region is a must; and should be strengthened in order to guarantee comprehensive responses based on security but prioritizing a protection and humanitarian perspective within the existing national, regional and international legal frameworks." - **Lorena Nieto - Discussion Moderator, UNHCR Colombia**

PART 2: Q. 5. SERVING THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE IN CONFLICT: How can we integrate peacebuilding principles into humanitarian efforts in the LAC region, while still preserving the principles of impartiality and neutrality? Please share your examples.

Currently there is not a systematized process of dialogue between humanitarian and peacebuilding actors on conflict dynamics which can bring an added value in successfully applying a peacebuilding approach to humanitarian work, ensuring conflict sensitivity, and that at a minimum assistance does not negatively impact conflict dynamics. The moderators asked participants to share their examples of successful ways to integrate peacebuilding approaches into humanitarian efforts in the LAC region, while still preserving the principles of impartiality and neutrality. Response to this question was relatively low, with only six comments received from participants from at least three countries including the USA, India and the Philippines, addressing issues related to the integration of peacebuilding principles with humanitarian efforts.

There was emerging consensus on the need for joint action between peacemaker's agents and humanitarian aid providers, since there is no systematized process of dialogue between humanitarian and peacebuilding actors on conflict dynamics, which could provide a peacebuilding approach to humanitarian work.

The need also emerged provide joint training for humanitarian personnel and peacemakers. For example, **Mabeh Evelyn** suggested they should combine their efforts and decide how to best undertake their work respecting the different domains. Additionally, **Dr. Josephine Acosta Pasricha (USA)** proposed the use of "[Systems Thinking](#)".

Finally, **May Huntington (USA)** suggested activities that humanitarian actors should develop with the community in order to incorporate the principles of peacebuilding into humanitarian aid, including: 1) train communities on the practical issues of peacebuilding and community security; 2) partners with other sectors (international, business, national, and local actors) to prevent cartels and criminal gangs from accessing ICTs; and 3) work to integrate indigenous sectors and ensure they are represented in the national and local government.

This interim summary was drafted with support from UN Online Volunteers: Christelle Cazabat (France), Ana Dominguez (Spain), Lyndall King (UK), Tina Mason (UK), and Maira Belén Vásquez (Argentina).

Disclaimer: the findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed in this discussion summary report are those of the participants and do not necessarily reflect the policies or views of the World Humanitarian Summit secretariat, UNOCHA, the United Nations or the participants' organizations.