



REGIONAL CONSULTATION FOR WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

ABIDJAN, CÔTE D'IVOIRE ON 19-20 JUNE 2014

Co-Chairs' Summary

The World Humanitarian Summit's regional consultation for west and central Africa was held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire on 19-20 June 2014. It was co-chaired by the Governments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Côte d'Ivoire, representing the Regional Steering Group. In the spirit of the summit process' multi-stakeholder approach, the consultation brought together 195 participants from 24 countries. This included representation from regional organisations, national and local governments, non-governmental organizations, affected communities, local and international civil society, the private sector, academia, the media, donor governments, and United Nations organizations.

The consultation was organized around the four themes of the Summit, and also took up over-arching issues as they arose. Participants worked in groups to discuss the diverse humanitarian needs in the region and to come up with recommendations on how best to meet the humanitarian challenges of the future. The discussions covered issues such as how to address the gap between early warning and response, in particular for the region's recurrent, seasonal shocks; the rising humanitarian risks in urban areas and how to better support municipalities and civil society to address them; how to put into practice accountability to affected people above all; and how to conduct effective, principled humanitarian action in the region's conflict situations.

This summary highlights some of the emerging recommendations. A full consultation report, which the Regional Steering Group will publish in the coming weeks, will capture the complete array of recommendations and common observations. The co-chairs encourage regional actors to quickly turn a number of the recommendations into specific action and programmes.

Photo credit:
Gao, Mali, 25 February 2014.
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Theme 1: Humanitarian Effectiveness



The preliminary consultations before Abidjan highlighted the importance of supporting national NGOs in building their capacity to respond to humanitarian crisis, to share information and build networks of national-level organizations across the region, and to engage with international organizations on issues of funding and coordination of the contributions of different actors involved in humanitarian work. The consultations also recognized the role of local actors and their existing organizations and social networks as the first line of response in any crisis, and recognized the importance of ensuring that communication with local leaders is established before a crisis occurs, and that information about early warning and available assistance is offered in accessible formats and in the languages of affected people. The Abidjan regional consultation further recommended that:

- Humanitarian action needs to be made more flexible in order to adapt to different types of crises, such as natural disaster or conflict situations, and to enable the adoption of new, more effective approaches.
- States should establish or strengthen legal frameworks that support humanitarian action, should clearly specify which government institutions are responsible for different tasks in humanitarian preparedness and response, and should provide the appropriate resources for those institutions.
- Humanitarian action should be specific to the local context and local humanitarian needs, and programmes should feature a clear system of communication with and feedback from affected people to ensure that their needs and preferences are met.
- Humanitarian actors should work with humanitarian donors to strengthen the harmonization of donor requirements, and ensure that humanitarian funding can flexibly adapt to changing needs, is provided in a more timely way, and requires appropriately light reporting.
- Regional mechanisms should be established to ensure that more timely and flexible funding is available for humanitarian preparedness and response, especially for national and local organisations.

Theme 2: Managing Risk and Reducing Vulnerability



Discussions focused on the major risks and challenges faced in the region. Participants explored improvements and better alignment between different early warning systems, and in particular highlighted the need for better communication with at-risk populations. The groups also gave attention to major new risks, such as epidemics and crop and livestock disease, and how to be alert to these.

A core risk faced in the region is the threat of recurrent, seasonal shocks—drought and food insecurity, but also flooding, disease outbreaks and malnutrition. Addressing this requires closing the gap between early warning and early action, and forging greater integration between stakeholders in order to be better prepared for this. Urbanisation is another factor demanding increased engagement with local authorities and communities to be better prepared for dealing with humanitarian crises. Finally, attention was given to improving the management of conflict-induced displacement, and building the resilience of people to protracted crises.

Recommendations:

- Governments should develop national risk management agencies, led at the Prime Ministerial level and financed nationally, which would coordinate the action of all ministries plus humanitarian and development partners, including integrated and prioritised assessment of risk and vulnerability each year.
- Governments should take increased responsibility for preparedness and response to seasonal and recurrent shocks, with the humanitarian community focusing their efforts on addressing acute needs.

- Governments and donors should increase the contribution of national budgets and development aid to building resilience. A potential way of going about this would be setting targets.
- The various humanitarian actors should map and review existing early warning systems within the region to improve their effectiveness and inter-linkages.
- National governments, with international support as needed, should build the capacity of municipal and local authorities to identify, prevent and respond to humanitarian risks in urban areas, through measures including staff training, multi-hazard contingency planning and increasing the investment of municipal budgets in risk management.
- All stakeholders should improve communication of early warning information to at-risk populations through better use of radio, traditional means and new technologies, and establish communication mechanisms so that affected people can inform government and agencies of their needs.

Theme 3: Transformation through Innovation



The experience of responding to the multiplicity of crises in West and Central Africa creates an opportune environment for humanitarian actors and organizations to apply and adapt new technologies, form partnerships with various actors, develop new approaches, and put in place better mechanisms for joint learning and sharing of innovative ideas. While there are known barriers to innovation such as the obligation to act quickly to save lives with limited resources, there are also numerous opportunities in the region—the diversity in donors, new response actors, partnerships across sectors and technological developments, to name a few.

Some of the challenges to innovation that the consultation identified included applying lessons learned, identifying innovations (especially those from the affected communities themselves), collecting evidence of successful innovations, scale-up of smaller initiatives, bringing local innovators and funders together and fostering partnerships. There is however a welcome trend in humanitarian and aid organizations of incorporating the habits and practices of affected populations under the term of innovation, reflecting the paramount importance of cultural relevancy and sensitivity. Discussions during the consultation also highlighted the need for a major shift in approach that would allow the humanitarian sector to better integrate, accompany and build projects around existing initiatives being put in place by affected populations themselves.

Recommendations:

- Humanitarian actors to map and strengthen regional centres of excellence for humanitarian assistance that professionalise the development of best practices and create communities of practice for key sectors. Humanitarian actors to further ensure learning and exchange on humanitarian action among these regional centres.
- Build a network for learning and exchange on humanitarian preparedness and response among regional organisations (for example, building on exchange program between ECOWAS and ASEAN).
- Humanitarian organizations to create a regional innovation fund to help link local innovators with private sector and organizations that can help to scale up innovations.
- Humanitarian organizations to map and strengthen public-private partnerships that are working well in humanitarian and development settings in the region and identify how to expand and scale them up to meet humanitarian challenges.
- Humanitarian actors to build a network for learning and exchange on humanitarian preparedness and response between regional organizations.

- Humanitarian organizations, in collaboration with the private sector, to create a permanent platform for partnerships in the region, which would allow the focus of partnerships to shift from competitive to collaborative advantages (through identifying mutual benefits to cooperation), create a common framework for cooperation, and allow participating private sector entities to proactively identify resources and capacities that they could leverage for humanitarian response in the region.
- Humanitarian organizations to further investigate the use of innovative methods for gaining access to affected populations (examples: gaining feedback by SMS, use of non-military drones, cash transfers).

Theme 4: Serving the Needs of People in Conflict



The region has been afflicted by numerous conflicts in recent years, and four of these continue (in CAR, DRC, Mali and Nigeria). Key issues in the region include a huge number of displaced people, peace-keeping operations with a very robust protection-of-civilians mandate (MONUSCO) or stabilisation mandate (Mali), and armed groups that are difficult to reach or fragmented (e.g. AQMI, Boko Haram, FDLR/Anti-balaka, Seleka). Most situations also have humanitarian access difficulties, due to security issues but also to logistical challenges (CAR). The region combines protracted conflicts (DRC), conflicts that have intensified in recent years (CAR, Nigeria) and more recent conflicts (Mali).

- Priority humanitarian needs according to the workshop participants include security, shelter and upholding dignity. Assistance (beyond shelter) also featured as important. The response must be quick in order to be effective and there needs to be investment in the capacity of local organizations before any crisis.
- Humanitarian organizations need to interact with all parties in a conflict, transparently. This interaction must not help reinforce one or the other party in the conflict (principle of neutrality).
- Humanitarian access should mean access of people to humanitarian goods and services, at least as much as access of humanitarian organizations to people.
- Humanitarian organizations should investigate and use innovative methods of gaining access or of compensating for limited access (such as feedback by SMS or use of non-military drones).
- Humanitarian organizations should adapt their action, from preparation to recovery, to local conditions—including culture and the dynamics of the conflict—through participation of the population. This will enable a timelier and more adapted response, contributing to upholding dignity of affected people.
- In order to strengthen humanitarian assistance and protection, and also allow the strengthening of national institutions and preventative measures, humanitarian actors should have a stronger dialogue with governments on the ratification and implementation of regional humanitarian frameworks and instruments, such as the Kampala Convention. States should ratify and also implement such instruments, and put into place a national legal and policy framework favouring humanitarian action.
- Gaining trust of parties to a conflict and also of the population is key to gaining access (even if it is not the only condition). Refusing to engage in a dialogue with some players or displaying a non-neutral position will directly impair access.
- Humanitarian organizations should make better use of civil-military coordination mechanisms.
- Wherever possible, the humanitarian community should avoid encouraging displaced people to congregate in camps by offering alternate aid delivery venues, like supporting them in host communities.

The co-chairs of the Regional Steering Group for the West and Central Africa WHS Regional Consultation (Mr. Louis Serge Tio /Government of Côte d'Ivoire and Mr. Laurent Tchelu Mwenyimali /Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo) endorse this summary.