

**OUTCOME REPORT: ECOSOC Private Sector Side Event:
The Power of Business in Emergencies – Working together in preparedness and
response
18 June, Geneva**

Introduction

The Economic and Social Council Humanitarian Affairs Segment (ECOSOC HAS), chaired by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), was held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, 17-19 June 2015. OCHA's Private Sector Section (PSS) organised a side event on the power of the private sector in emergency response. The panel, chaired by Ms. Gwi-Yeop Son, Director, Corporate Programmes Division, OCHA, included Jesus R.S. Domingo, Assistant Secretary for the United Nations and International Organizations in the Department of Foreign Affairs, Government of the Philippines; Claire Esbenshade, Corporate Responsibility and Sustainable Investment Specialist at ArcelorMittal; and Martin Harris, Director of Technology, GSMA Mobile for Development. The panelists identified issues and provided recommendations on the humanitarian community engaging with the private sector in humanitarian action; creating networks and platforms, and; principles, charters and regulatory environments necessary for an improved future humanitarian model.

Challenges

The following challenges emerged from the discussion:

1. The need to develop greater trust between private sector actors, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the UN, other international organizations (IOs), and governments. The current framework of cooperation does not help build solidarity and trust between different stakeholders during emergency response.
2. International and national regulatory constraints that hinder emergency response by mobile network operators.
3. Inadequate inclusion of private sector actors in the international response framework despite their ability to fill gaps.
4. Counterproductive perceptions of companies as financial donors. However, their resources, expertise, supply chains, research and development capabilities, and logistics can be better utilized for more effective humanitarian action.
5. Most private sector employees lack the experience to respond efficiently to emergencies. Moreover, companies do not have the resources in place to support their employees physically and psychologically in an emergency.
6. Identifying relevant entry points for partnerships and cooperation.
7. Understanding needs of affected people and humanitarian responders in an emergency.
8. Understanding the framework for collaboration with the international humanitarian community in an emergency. Companies' reputational risks may increase when attempting to assist with high profile emergencies if that framework is not clear. For example, in the fight against Ebola there were many unknowns regarding the health emergency itself and the humanitarian response. Therefore, it was difficult for companies to persuade their own constituencies to approve engagement.
9. Extending UN initiatives with the private sector to include NGOs.
10. Custom and immigration laws of several countries are not flexible enough in emergencies, which limits the resources and staff of the private sector to be deployed at short notice.

Recommendations

The following solutions were recommended:

1. Governments should promote and establish enabling environments for the private sector to engage in humanitarian action. Delegates from the Philippines and Norway gave examples on how they put in place institutional frameworks that created business-friendly environments for humanitarian action. For example, in the aftermath of the typhoon Haiyan in December 2013

the government of the Philippines promptly set up 'One Stop Shops' at international airports, bringing several government agencies together in one location to expedite customs clearances for humanitarian shipments. Similarly, the Norwegian government, together with its partners, set up the Norwegian Emergency Preparedness System (NOREPS) in 1991 which provides relief supplies and personnel to the UN system and other international organizations in their efforts to reach disaster areas without delay.

2. The panel suggested that the UN uses its convening power and establishes its leadership by partnering with businesses and connecting the humanitarian community with the private sector.
3. Given that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) constitute a considerable part of the private sector in most countries, SMEs need to be better integrated into national emergency response plans. Consequently, this would have positive effects on post-disaster reconstruction and economic stability.
4. The UN should be more flexible and open to scaling up new technologies in response to emergencies. It was recommended that the UN should encourage partnerships with startups and technology giants to develop prototypes and new technologies for deployments in emergency response.
5. Humanitarian and private sector actors should share more experience, resources and tools to help improve their effectiveness in emergency response. Cooperation is essential to help both parties evolve and to improve emergency response and preparedness.
6. A commitment was made to continue this dialogue and to hold a side business consultation in the margins of the WHS Global consultation in Geneva, facilitated by OCHA PSS.