



People at the Centre

SPECIAL SESSION SUMMARY

Core Responsibility Four of the Agenda for Humanity

I. Overview

There was a strong call from the World Humanitarian Summit consultations to mark a major shift in humanitarian action by truly empowering affected people as the driving force of any humanitarian response. In community consultations conducted in five countries by WHS, more than two thirds of people said they felt they had little to no influence over the aid they had received.¹ If humanitarian responses are to be relevant, timely, effective and efficient, then affected people must be at the centre of decisions affecting delivery.

The objective of the special session was to invite strong commitments from stakeholders that would recognize people and communities affected by crises as the primary agents of response, increasing their voice, choice and leadership in humanitarian assistance. While the session was directly linked to Core Responsibility Four of the Secretary General's Agenda for Humanity on changing people's lives, from delivering aid to ending need, it cuts across all five core responsibilities which lay the foundations for humanitarian actors and other stakeholders to work more effectively to uphold people's safety, dignity and the right to thrive.

“Listening to people is not simply a box to be checked off — but a fundamental requirement in shaping programmes and services effectively and in a timely and relevant way.”

Anthony Lake, Executive Director, UNICEF

¹ Explore the consultation reports with affected communities here:
<https://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/consultation-reports#thematic-report-linking>

This Special Session invited commitments from stakeholders which:

- Ensure affected people know what they can expect from aid providers and are able to express their views and concerns.
- Ensure all humanitarian responses, including member states and donor countries, listen and respond to the feedback and perceptions of affected people.

Proposed commitments included the following:

- All stakeholders should adopt the Core Humanitarian Standard and International Aid Transparency Initiative Standard, with clear benchmarks for achieving these.
- All stakeholders should adopt the IASC Statement on the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation & Abuse at the individual agency level.
- Donors should commit to make sustained funding conditional on the systematic collection of feedback from affected people on the quality and utility of humanitarian programmes.
- Humanitarian agencies should establish a common approach to providing information to affected people and collecting, aggregating and analysing feedback from communities to influence decision-making processes at strategic and operational levels.

II. Key outcomes/themes

It was acknowledged throughout the session that to truly put affected people at the centre of humanitarian response requires a significant change in mindset among humanitarian actors. In the rush to provide assistance, doing it right can seem complex and time-consuming, but designing responses right from the start can significantly increase their impact and efficiency. Humanitarian responders must be accountable to crisis-affected people, not merely to donors, and this accountability must be meaningful and result in action: collecting affected people's feedback must result in tangible action. Participants agreed that the competitive and mandate-focused nature of humanitarian aid hinders system-wide accountability. The Grand Bargain's inclusions of standardized accountability systems to address shortcomings was welcomed.

There was a strong emphasis on strengthening the capacity of local actors, as well as ensuring that these first responders are more consistently and reliably resourced when crises hit, as well as shifting decision-making power to the local level.

There was a particular focus on the importance of cash programming, which currently represents only 6% of all humanitarian aid, as a means to empower people and enable them to decide how to allocate their resources in a crisis.

Technological solutions were also highlighted as a critical tool both to reach affected people and for people to reach responders and communicate amongst each other. The humanitarian community should place a greater emphasis on engagement with and investment in innovative crisis response tools.

Overall, the following commitments and announcements were made during the session:²

- Increasing funding to local partners by at least 30% by 2018 [Oxfam International]
- Publishing the percentage of humanitarian funding that goes towards capacity building [Oxfam International]
- Creating an Asian Local Resilience Forum to strengthen and celebrate the capacity of local actors [ADRRN]
- Endorsing and signing the Principles of Partnership introduced by the Global Humanitarian Platform [Oxfam]
- Committing to the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) to make humanitarian assistance more responsive to the needs of people [Oxfam]
- Committing to create platforms for dialogue and conflict resolution, for faith-based dialogue, particularly in aftermath of disasters. [ADRRN]
- Establishing a common platform to strengthen communication and community engagement. [UNICEF]
- Adopting the Humanitarian Connectivity Charter for mobile network operators, pledging to make mobile services more accessible to those affected by humanitarian crises through the provision of free or subsidized network access where appropriate. [Turkcell]
- Restating commitment to legal frameworks for the repatriation process of Somali refugees through a tripartite agreement [Kenya]

III. Way Forward

While the case for putting people at the centre of humanitarian action was well outlined during the session, bolder commitments are necessary from all stakeholders, including donors, to enable a significant mindset-shift among humanitarian actors. Incentives for individual organizations and for the collective will need to be established if this is to be achieved.

The Grand Bargain offers a significant step towards establishing system-wide accountability—its associated commitments should therefore be prioritized and implemented by stakeholders with clear benchmarks.

² Most of the announcements highlighted in this section were made verbally at the Summit. Commitments that were submitted in writing can be found online at: www.agendaforhumanity.org

Advocacy for the adoption and implementation of the [Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability](#) will also be necessary to support this shift and ensure operational changes at the field level. The CHS Alliance will be tracking all commitments made to the CHS, and will make available its self-assessment tool to all stakeholders.

While no mention was made during the session on the Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, concrete measures will need to be taken by those stakeholders who adopted the IASC statement and will be monitored by the IASC Task Team on Accountability to Affected People.

IV. Speakers

Chair:

- Ms. Jamila Rajaa, Peacebuilding and Civil Society activist, Yemen

Speakers:

- Mr. William Ruto, Deputy President, Kenya
- Ms. Isabella Lövin, Minister for International Development Cooperation, Sweden
- Mr. Anthony Lake, Executive Director, UNICEF
- Ms. Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director, Oxfam International
- Dr. Manu Gupta, Chair, Asia Disaster Reduction & Response Network (ADRRN)
- Mr. Kaan Terzioğlu, Chief Executive Officer, Turkcell