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# REGIONAL CONSULTATION LATIN AMERICA-CARIBBEAN GUATEMALA CITY, 5-6 MAY 2015



## CO-CHAIRS' SUMMARY

The World Humanitarian Summit regional consultation for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) was held in Guatemala City, Guatemala on 5-7 May 2015. It was hosted by the Government of Guatemala and co-chaired by Guatemala (the National Coordination Body for Disaster Reduction – CONRED for its acronym in Spanish) and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA). The LAC regional consultation, the sixth of the eight WHS regional consultations, was the first to take place within the framework of an established and recognized regional humanitarian dialogue, the International Mechanisms for Humanitarian Assistance (MIAH by its Spanish acronym). By integrating the WHS LAC to the VII MIAH meeting, the former was strengthened through the already established processes, alliances, relationships and actions. Furthermore, the broad participation of different sectors in the WHS process served to strengthen and reinforce the MIAH itself, which will remain active in LAC after the WHS consultation concludes.

The meeting was preceded by a preparatory stakeholder consultation with 4,786 individuals, 50% of whom came from affected populations and civil society groups in specific situations of vulnerability. In addition, 32 consultation events were held in 23 countries, focus group discussions were held in 18 countries and individual interviews held in 13 countries. Consultations also took place through virtual spaces, with the general public and specifically with academic and non-governmental organizations. The region also hosted the first WHS consultation on Gender Equality.

This alliance of the MIAH/WHS meeting brought together more than 180 participants, panellists and facilitators from Member States, regional and sub-regional organizations, the United Nations System, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, international and national civil society organizations, academia, women's groups, indigenous people, private sector and affected communities. Roughly 52% were male and 48% were female. Additionally, representatives from Guatemala and Member States from other regions that have hosted or will host other WHS consultations were present as observers. Finally the support of more than 80 collaborators that guaranteed the different aspects of the event were carried out successfully is recognized.

The WHS LAC was organized around the four global themes of the Summit, and a fifth space for dialogue on displacement and violence was added given its high relevance and impact in the region. Within this context, some of the more mentioned cross-cutting themes that emerged throughout the discussions during the VII MIAH include:

- Recognize and promote the central role of affected people and communities in humanitarian action, and guarantee spaces for their empowerment and leadership in all phases of humanitarian action.
- Recognize the value of ancestral and traditional knowledge from populations as an important contribution to humanitarian action in the region.
- Reaffirm the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and operational Independence, with a focus on rights and inclusion, and ensure that International Humanitarian Law prevails and is respected.
- Reaffirm the primary role of leadership and responsibility of the affected State in responding to the needs of its people in situations of disaster and crisis. To this effect, the development of public policy, laws and norms with a comprehensive humanitarian focus oriented towards resilience; and that address the problematic of climate change, as well as risks associated with urbanization, through actions for the reduction of disaster risk; is imperative
- Recognize the fundamental importance of holistic coordination between all actors and at all levels, with particular consideration for voices and contributions of local people and communities, as well as of groups who may be placed in situations of greater vulnerability or have specific needs: women, girls and boys, adolescents and young people, the elderly, persons with disabilities, indigenous populations, people of African descent and others.
- Seek complementarities and ways to reduce gaps between the humanitarian and sustainable development agendas, with the aim of reducing vulnerability.
- Incorporate an inclusive vision in all humanitarian action that is based on human rights and promotes gender equality.

The following summary highlights the most salient points of the discussions, as well as a series of recommendations and other general aspects of the discussions that emerged from the VII MIAH.

A full consultation report of the WHS LAC, to be published in the coming weeks will capture the totality of conclusions, recommendations and other observations made during the whole consultation process. This report will be available at [www.worldhumanitariansummit.org](http://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org) as well as the regional network [www.redhum.org](http://www.redhum.org), and also [www.conred.gob.gt](http://www.conred.gob.gt) and [www.minex.gob.gt](http://www.minex.gob.gt).

The Co-chairs would like to thank all actors for their participation and involvement in the WHS LAC and encourage them to support the recommendations and turn them into concrete actions, as well as continue discussing key issues and exchanging information and experiences.

## Humanitarian Effectiveness

Given the limited resources (financial as well as human) available and the increasing pressures on them, effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action in LAC becomes imperative in order to serve the most urgent needs of people and to increase their resilience. For this, it is necessary to evaluate the existing indicators and tolls and either improve them or create new ones. This will favour accountability and transparency, at all levels, stemming from the level of satisfaction of the affected communities and of the measure of impact of humanitarian action in the wake of an increase of disasters and complex crisis. This focus will allow affected persons to be at the center of humanitarian action before, during and after disasters and crises, and be recognized as architects of their own

development, not merely passive and vulnerable recipients of assistance. The need to ensure inclusivity of women and women's groups whose contributions and capacities are often ignored, was discussed.

Regional consensus exists on the value-added offered by participation and inclusion of non-traditional stakeholders in the humanitarian arena, for example private sector and academia, and additionally, of the risks of their participation if they do not follow humanitarian principles. It is recognized that these actors can play a key role in preparedness, response and recovery, and should commit themselves at all levels (regional, national and local) to actions that are beneficial for all stakeholders.

The middle-income level economic indicators reported by the majority of LAC countries hide the high levels of inequality that are one of the primary causes of conditions of vulnerability in segments of the population. A consequence of this economic categorization is that cooperation (both regional as well as international) does not take into consideration the availability of financial resources proportionate to the true need faced by populations in humanitarian situations, as well as in their conditions of disaster and crisis risk reduction.

To achieve more effective coordination, it is fundamental that tools and methodologies, as well as agreement on common goals with complementary actions, are harmonized. There are gaps in the area of legal frameworks which could facilitate international humanitarian action, concretely in the coordination between multiple actors, such as: the Regional Mechanism for Mutual Assistance in Disasters of the Central American Integration System (MecReg-SICA by its Spanish acronym), and the Caribbean Regional Mechanism for Response, coordinated by the Caribbean Disaster and Emergency Management Agency, CDEMA.

Full recognition exists on the direct responsibility of States in humanitarian leadership in the case of disasters or crisis, through their national structures and their local and municipal governments in a country's affected areas.

Examples from the LAC region are highlighted in the creation of simple-to-use standard operating procedures, efficient information systems, digital databases open to all, as a result of joint drills and simulations as concrete ways to support clarity of roles, responsibilities and levels of authority.

### Recommendations:

- Adapt the humanitarian response to the diverse and different needs of the crisis and to the humanitarian context in which it is operating, in order to define who is who and what is the role or expectations to be covered.
- Strengthen coordination, monitoring and reporting processes through platforms that promote the participation of the different stakeholders in humanitarian action. This could be done at different levels, in particular at the municipal levels.
- Improve coordination between the different agendas and actors responsible for humanitarian action, including from the public, private, civil society and academic sectors at all levels.
- Train local authorities in the areas of preparedness and response to disasters and crisis, and improve national processes and protocols for delivery of humanitarian assistance to affected communities, with a focus on differentiating the response based on needs and context<sup>1</sup>.
- Update and adapt to the context and new realities methodologies and processes for rapid needs assessment, with the participation of multidisciplinary, gender-balanced teams.
- Include in planning processes independent accountability mechanisms and processes that involve affected people, to increase levels of transparency in the actions carried out by all humanitarian actors.
- Facilitate access by local organizations to international financial resources, taking into account communities' knowledge about their own contexts, and establish clear mechanisms and procedures to understand and define the best modalities in the use of transfers of goods and services to affected populations.
- Establish clear mechanisms and procedures to understand and define the best modalities to reach affected people using cash-based assistance.

<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that 70% of people consulted in communities that participated in the consultation process indicated that they were not prepared for disasters.

- Create or strengthen national and regional financing tools that include quicker and more flexible activation mechanisms, so that national governments can access them and, as a result, respond to small and medium scale emergencies before making an international appeal.
- Promote the private sector, academia and other new actors as strategic partners in humanitarian action that with sufficient formation, contribute to humanitarian action and, in similar fashion, support the role of the State.
- Promote the establishment of regional financial mechanisms with contributions from the countries in the region and international donors.

## Reducing vulnerability and managing risk

Recent humanitarian situations in the LAC region<sup>2</sup>, in addition to the evidence of increased risk in communities due to unplanned urbanization, extreme poverty, environmental degradation and the effects of climate change, have revealed challenges to humanitarian action, and reflects the need to focus on longer-term, more sustainable development oriented solutions that reduce the underlying causes of vulnerabilities. The increase in the frequency and intensity of natural hazards and epidemics represents major challenges to the range of actors that comprise the humanitarian system in the region.

Disasters and crises have different consequences for different people and groups, and the specific needs of those that might become more vulnerable during these situations must be taken into consideration and addressed. These groups include: women of reproductive age, boys and girls (especially in early childhood), people with disabilities, indigenous populations, people of African descent, the elderly and excluded and marginalized groups (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities; minorities).

It is important to recognize the individuality of persons in order to guarantee humanitarian action that respects their dignity and favours a dignified recovery of recipients of assistance.

The importance of using existing technology was highlighted: including geo-referencing and digital mapping, to increase the effectiveness and efficiency in the mapping of persons with specific needs.

Indigenous, traditional and ancestral knowledge are seen as critical pieces of knowledge and wisdom and should be valued and considered in all phases of humanitarian action and of disaster risk reduction management.

It is necessary that the humanitarian system in LAC be clear about what is meant by resilience and, at the same time, what is implied by actions that lead to resilience.

### Recommendations:

- Reinforce existing capacities and generate new capacities in the areas of knowledge and comprehensive risk management (vulnerabilities, threats and exposure), especially in urban contexts, with the aim of addressing the causes in a multidimensional manner and, as such, increase the resilience of communities and guarantee their livelihoods.
- Contribute to Government plans, at their different levels, so they deepen work with the communities in areas of risk reduction and preparation, particularly in the design of early warning systems.
- Systematically include humanitarian and disaster risk reduction dimensions in multi-sectorial policies for sustainable development, to promote a comprehensive approach and strengthen the resilience of the people.
- Develop with communities information and disaggregated data generation tools that include statistics and risk maps that are accessible and easy-to-use for the communities.
- Prioritize actions that eliminate all forms of violence, especially sexual and domestic violence, that tend to increase in post-disaster and crisis situations and that affect more vulnerable persons, such as women, boys and girls, in a different manner.

<sup>2</sup> Studies such as the Global evaluation on disaster risk reduction 2015 and the Global risk report of the University of the United Nations 2014 highlight the levels of risk exposure given different factors in LAC.



- Develop joint professional training programs linked to issues of risk management and reduction that involve the different actors in humanitarian action; as well as take advantage of the experience and capacities the academic sector can offer for the development of courses and programs in disaster risk reduction and attention to emergencies in university curricula.
- Medium and longer-term financing should be predictable and aimed at reducing barriers between humanitarian and sustainable development financing, and should be focused on actions in risk management, reduction, preparedness, building resilience and response.
- Recognize the role of development solutions in reducing vulnerability as an important element to address challenges. Explore the alignment of humanitarian programs with national recovery programs and how to integrate sustainable development solutions in their plans of action to ensure the programs do not create or exacerbate socio-economic gaps in the country.
- Understand the importance of market dynamics and undertake or utilize vulnerability and capacity assessments to establish and adjust priorities for the most appropriate time of assistance, for example cash, vouchers, or other modalities that help strengthen local markets and contribute to building resilience.

## Transformation through innovation

To face the realities and future challenges in LAC, it is essential that humanitarian actors innovate, not only with new technologies, but also through new and creative ways of operating. In LAC innovation is seen as a means to an end, and not an end in and of itself.

Affected persons and communities are the center of humanitarian work that said innovations must be aligned with humanitarian imperatives. Moreover, innovation is not synonymous with technology, nor “invention” and innovations should always take into consideration and consult with local experiences and ancestral knowledge. In that vein, innovations should ensure they are sustainable, relevant and necessary to the context.

The humanitarian landscape was understood to be dynamic and changing, and despite the fact that certain changes take time to be assimilated; this reality must be accepted in order to keep pace with increasing challenges. These changes run the spectrum of the global humanitarian architecture and are reflected in the work done at local and community levels by first responders. The growing tendency in the humanitarian world of seeing the quantification of actions and the compilation of data as an efficient way of promoting accountabilities contributes to a reductionist focus in humanitarian planning and innovation, undermining the creativity and innovation of itself.

Humanitarian innovation should promote social inclusion; clearly identify humanitarian needs and priorities; and contribute to reducing vulnerability and building resilience. For that, it is necessary to ensure the active participation as part of humanitarian action of socially marginalized groups and in particular the full participation of girls, boys and young persons, whose involvement as actors favour the generation of innovation and contribute to the development of future advances in the area of humanitarian action.

Collaboration is key for innovation. Challenges in the current landscape, for example in competition for funding, must be overcome and cooperation must prevail, as it can jeopardize the well-being of affected people and the impact of humanitarian action. Increased collaboration would also open space for other actors and stakeholders.

There is a need to develop incentives for humanitarian innovation, both financial and non-financial. This would support groups of innovative talented people and organizations willing to contribute their creativity to humanitarian causes in the LAC region.

### Recommendations:

- Base humanitarian innovation on responding to concrete needs and respond to the demands of affected people. The process of introducing innovative initiatives should be done in participative way, with consultations and exchange of ideas with affected people and communities.
- Develop strategies for innovation that use traditional and ancestral knowledge and promote the participation of affected people as active agents in finding solutions. Innovation can consist of applying traditional knowledge or methods to contemporary problems.

- Utilize private sector tools to facilitate feedback from affected people about the quality of humanitarian assistance received, and use the information gathered to improve future programmes.
- Leverage existing national platforms, and build platforms in countries where they do not yet exist, to include public, private and academic sector organizations in activities to generate and strengthen community-based tools and practices that improve the quality of humanitarian action.
- Invest in developing analytical capacity and networks at all levels, to identify innovative and creative opportunities to better understand and manage disaster risk and improve efficiency and planning of humanitarian action.
- Establish 'centres of excellence' to strengthen the participation of the public, private and academic sectors in generating joint training programmes and implementing innovative practices in humanitarian action.
- Systematize and develop platforms for innovation in corresponding organizations, for example by organizing fairs or events at the regional or national level, and each country and organization should undertake exercises to prepare institutions to work in more innovative ways, taking into consideration financing for innovation and return on investment on activities related to innovation, as well as disaster risk management.
- Adopt international standards for humanitarian action (for example, SPHERE, LEGS and the Core Humanitarian Standard), and contribute to the development of principles of innovation to offer guidance to humanitarian organizations for their innovation activities in the region.
- Explore concrete opportunities for innovation in areas such as: access by victims of violence to protection services, and livelihood support taking into account displacement and economic losses driven by environmental and climate factors (droughts, flooding, freezes and others).
- Utilize innovations in technology and information systems to design programmes oriented to addressing the specific needs in urban areas and to utilize the available in urban areas.
- Leverage existing technological platforms (for example, social media and telecoms networks) in order to fill gaps and scarcities in situations of disaster and crisis, especially in urban areas where people's use of these platforms is highly prevalent.
- Prioritize a qualitative narrative in planning, implementation and accountability with and towards affected communities, replacing a quantitative approach with a human narrative that reflects the richness, complexity and interconnectivity of the experience in the most critical moments of the disaster and crisis that favours inclusion and the interests of the most vulnerable.

## Displacement and violence

A space for dialogue on 'Displacement and Violence' was included in the WHS LAC meeting as an independent theme given the relevance and impact of these issues in the region. Four of the five countries and 43 of the 50 cities with the highest levels of violence at the global level are located in the LAC region<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, by the end of 2013, at least 6.3 million people had been subject to internal displacement in the Americas, clearly constituting a concern for humanitarian action.

The high levels of violence and insecurity challenge humanitarian action and raise questions about the application of humanitarian standards to other frontline actors who face these situations on a day-to-day basis.

The challenges for humanitarian action in urban contexts are an ever growing priority, considering that most of the displaced are moving into cities where vulnerabilities are often exacerbated and generate new forms of non-conventional violence. These manifestations of violence must be recognized and mechanisms that highlight the risks from a multisectoral approach that does not stigmatize the communities must be established.

Taking a more comprehensive approach to security includes guaranteeing and protecting victims' rights, as well as looking beyond the presence of law enforcement authorities. The underlying causes of violence and their consequences needs to be understood in order to develop effective and appropriate strategies to address them.

<sup>3</sup> [www.forbes.com.mx/las-50-ciudades-mas-violentas-del-mundo/](http://www.forbes.com.mx/las-50-ciudades-mas-violentas-del-mundo/) and in <http://www.infobae.com/2014/08/30/1591127-las-10-ciudades-mas-seguras-y-las-10-mas-peligrosa-del-mundo> (27042015), the latter based on data from the United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime

Other issues that should continue to be monitored and addressed include: building an increased understanding of threats and risks; strengthening of networks and dialogue with youth; increased precision regarding the concept of “victim”, and regulation regarding the listing of the humanitarian visa category and its corresponding specifications.

The space for dialogue that took place during the WHS LAC meeting had the objective of generating an open conversation among participants based on the key findings of the consultation process, as well as the considerations presented by four panellists, who represented perspectives from the global, regional and local levels. The session did not aim to establish conclusions, recommendations or action points. The following are a few central points of reflection from the Co-Chairs based on the dialogue that took place.

### Key considerations:

- Participants reaffirmed the fundamental role of the State as guarantee of the security of citizens, additionally, it was emphasized that all initiatives that seek to increase capacities must be done within a framework of locally defined priorities and always respecting the principle of sovereignty and internationally agreed humanitarian principles.
- The region has a regional legal framework for refugees (the Cartagena Declaration), which is recognized as a global model used by other regions to address refugee issues. Participants recognized the importance of having national and regional normative frameworks for these issues, especially for the protection and assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs).
- Access by humanitarian actors to places with high incidences of violence presents enormous challenges for humanitarian action, especially as those displaced in urban areas are highly mobile and often seek anonymity. Participants recognized the importance and role of local actors who have access to, and trust of, communities in these areas. International entities were invited to work closely with the local actors that have access to affected persons and understand the context dynamics. The different forms of violence were identified as a fundamental cause of displacement and migration of populations in the region.
- Humanitarians recognized that humanitarian access is key and is an element that should not be taken for granted.
- Deeper knowledge and a more concerted approach are needed to confront the fundamental drivers of violence, for example: rapid unplanned urbanization, marginalization, discrimination, lack of socio-economic opportunities, corruption, impunity and institutional weakness. Breaking the cycle of violence therefore requires a comprehensive response to sustainable development.
- Participants recognized that the involvement of the community is essential to understand and address violence from the perspectives of the context where it occurs.
- Each country is faced with different issues related to violence and displacement, but as many participants recognized, these problems require regional solutions, given the cross-border nature of migration.
- Participants noted the importance of having systems and tools to monitor the situation of violence and displacement in the LAC region, and that protect the identity of affected persons. The potential for a network to exchange information with a view to having better understanding on the issues at hand was also recognized.
- It is important to recognize that the majority of the displaced people are located in urban areas where they are not visible and they do not have access to basic services, employment or assistance, which makes them more vulnerable to disaster risks.
- It is important to recognize that women, boys, girls, adolescents and young people, indigenous groups and people of African descent have specific needs in situations of violence and displacement and are the most affected, because of that they are critical components in the reduction and attention to this phenomenon. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and human trafficking in these contexts.
- Finally, participants noted the importance of creating strategies for holistic human development to address the root causes of violence, and to avoid stigmatization of people living in violent contexts.
- Non-conventional violence has multiple interpretations and the term should be used with caution given that in some cases these interpretations could deviate from humanitarian principles and objectives.

## Serving the needs of people in conflict

Although gripped with very high levels of violence, the region suffers less, compared to other regions of the world, with inter and intra-state conflict. As such, the applicability of the issue was limited and was not addressed in all countries during the consultation process. Where it was discussed, stakeholders noted that the general objective of humanitarian actors is to ensure the access and support of all people affected by conflicts, and strategies must be developed to achieve this.

There is concern that limited understanding in certain cases of the complexities of conflict may hinder effective present and future humanitarian action. Implementation of humanitarian programming and the promotion of a rights-based approach was recommended to improve action and impact.

Conflict affects different people, groups and sectors in different ways. Certain population groups and non-combatants become more vulnerable and are exposed to increased risk in situations of conflict, and this reality must be acknowledged and addressed.

This section reflects the elements that were highlighted by participants in the national consultations and the perspectives gathered in the Preparatory Stakeholder Analysis, which noted four areas for further exploration in the section on Serving the Needs of People in Conflict. It does not aim to establish recommendations, rather to highlight some of the most important aspects of the document and the panel that addressed this theme. Given this approach, the general aspects of the discussion included the following:

- The international humanitarian system needs to adapt to different contexts based on a thorough and in depth analysis of the particular characteristics of conflict contexts [as different from disasters], and its actions should aim to strengthen and complement the capacities of national and local institutions.
- Programme planning should be approached in a holistic way, including the provision of basic services and protection, to serve the needs people affected by conflict, particularly the specific needs of different groups of the affected population.
- Consider the central role of affected people and communities and their participation in finding solutions to their own challenges, with focus on differentiated and sex-disaggregated approaches based on different needs.
- Managing information in a holistic, and interconnected manner, is fundamental to understanding the realities of affected people, and communicating information to relevant actors in order to most effectively serve affected people.
- The notion and importance of coordination and connection between international, national and local actors was highlighted, in particular with respect to importance of countries establishing legal frameworks and public policies for serving the needs of people in conflict that are complementary to international frameworks, including international humanitarian law.
- It is important to link humanitarian action with sustainable development and to develop exit strategies for humanitarian aid/actors, as well as the most appropriate and opportune timeframe for exiting.
- The importance, and principal role, of the state was noted as well as the utility of adopting normative and legal frameworks for the protection of all, including internally displaced people.