Private Sector Engagement in Humanitarian Response in Latin America and the Caribbean

Below are highlights from a 2015 OCHA-sponsored survey of business leaders in Latin America and the Caribbean, including key opportunities for and challenges related to engagement between the private and public sectors to address disaster preparedness and response.

Opportunities

Of the 80% of private-sector respondents who have partnered with the public-sector in the past, three-quarters (75%) do so only through ad hoc engagements (see Figure 1). This is a higher percentage than other regions surveyed, and many of these ad hoc engagements could, and likely should, develop into longer-term arrangements that enable quick response—and our survey results suggest business leaders would be open to discussing whether and how to transform ad hoc collaborations into long-term partnerships.

The survey asked respondents to identify the areas of innovation which have the most potential to improve emergency response. The Latin America and Caribbean are consistent with other regions surveyed in that the same three stood out as having the most opportunity:

1. Improved use of information and communications technologies such as mobile phones, internet and social media (selected by 71% of respondents)
2. Better communication with and participation of affected communities in disaster response (selected by 58% of respondents)
3. Improved logistics and delivery of assistance (selected by 54% of respondents)

The survey findings suggest an openness among business leaders to engage with the public sector to maximize the value of their efforts, though they do not necessarily know **how** to engage with these organizations.

Many of the goals that motivate business leaders to invest in emergency preparedness and response align well with the objectives of the public-sector organizations. As shown in Figure 2, top motivations include fulfilling Corporate Social Responsibility commitments, improved employee morale, enhancing goodwill among affected governments and communities. Creating economic value (e.g., increased profits and/or expansion of market share) is relatively unimportant to most respondents when compared to the other motivating factors.

Finally, the measures of success used by the private and public sectors also align well. When asked to rank the most important aspects of an effective humanitarian response, respondents ranked capabilities in the following order:

1. Speed in the delivery of relief goods
2. Number of people reached
3. Proportion of people reached (as a sub-set of those in need)
4. Participation by local communities and organizations
5. Responsiveness to views from the affected community on the usefulness and appropriateness of the assistance provided
6. Quality of goods / services provided

In fact speed of delivery is often noted as an area where businesses have a unique advantage over humanitarian responders, particularly in the case of global corporations with strong local operations as well as small and medium sized local businesses.

Challenges

Decisions regarding how private sector organizations engage in humanitarian response are most often made by the CEO and executive boards, rather than heads of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (see Figure 3). Humanitarian organizations interested in sustainable partnerships should engage with these business leaders, rather than focusing time and effort on traditional CSR interactions.

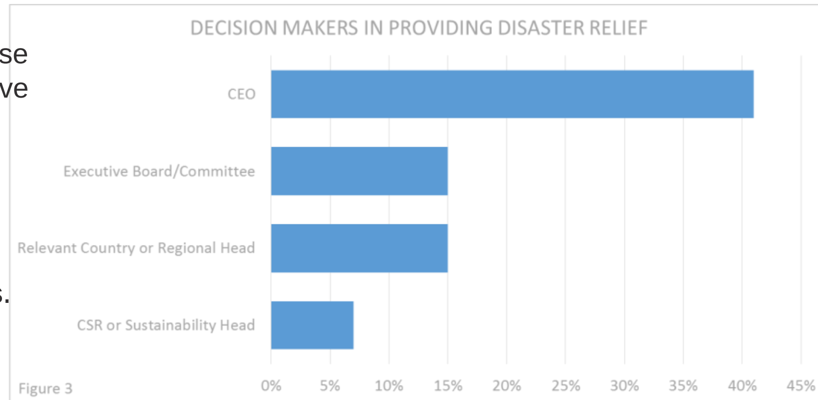

Figure 3

Despite the opportunities for mutual benefit, some significant barriers limit private sector interest in working with the public sector (see Figure 4). To fully engage business leaders, humanitarian actors need to confront questions about how the private sector can initiate engagement with the humanitarian community efficiently allocate resources.

Key questions for further exploration

The scope of this survey was broad. However, very little information was gleaned regarding collaboration in conflict zones. The limited data indicate business leaders see conflict situations as undesirable (i.e., they harm business more than help it) and they have a desire to reduce the incident and/or impact of conflict in areas where they do business. However, no clear answers emerged regarding whether and, if so how, businesses might work with the public sector to accomplish these goals.

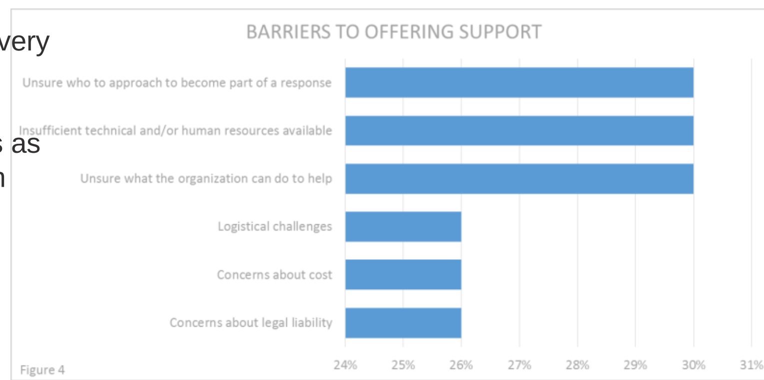

Figure 4

Survey method

During February/March 2015, the survey was sent to leaders within private sector organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean. Through invitations from OCHA, the Business Support Group in Disasters Situations of Peru (presided by the National Society of Industries), the UN Global Compact, and PADF, 92 individuals from regional, national, and multinational companies responded. All respondents have operations in the region, and 89% of respondents are also headquartered there. Participating companies ranged in size from fewer than 20 employees to more than 50,000. Company revenues ranged from less than $100K to more than $5B. Of the survey respondents, 36% report that they have been directly impacted by a humanitarian emergency, and 57% of respondents have engaged in the response to humanitarian emergencies.

The survey was administered by Vantage Partners. Additional surveys will be conducted in other regions in advance of the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit.