Humanitarian Action in 2025: What future ahead of us?

Record of discussions

Conference organised by SCHR on 19 January 2015, and hosted by ICRC in Geneva

Welcome

Yves Daccord, Chair of SCHR and Director General of ICRC opened the Conference by expressing his excitement at the prospect of the day's discussions.

He explained the thinking behind the Conference and clarified his expectations:

- SCHR CEOs had wanted to bring together a small select group of leaders and thinkers, from different spheres of activity, to analyse together the changes we are seeing in the world around us, and reflect and challenge each other on those changes to come;
- Addressing himself to the humanitarian leaders present in particular, the day's discussions would help them get away from the self-referencing frame that they tend to be caught in, and understand how they need to adapt to make sure they respond to what people affected by crisis will be expecting in terms of support and partnerships in the future.

He went on to state that this event also marks the start of his chairmanship of SCHR, a voluntary alliance of some of the biggest humanitarian organisations and the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement and that SCHR CEOs are looking at new ways of using their collective convening power to influence positive change, in this period of significant transformation of humanitarian action. He then expressed his hope that this event will open up different perspectives for each participant and that all would be as creative, forward thinking and provocative as possible.

Finally, he shared the plan of following up on this event with another one early 2016 and asked for candid feedback and suggestions at the end of the day.

Thinking 2025: what are we trying to achieve today?

Dr Hugo Slim, Associate Director and Senior Research Fellow, Oxford University, Institute for Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict, the moderator and facilitator for the Conference, presented the objectives for the day as well as expected outcomes and how participants would work together. The objectives for the day were presented as:

- Anticipate: Identify key social, technological and organizational trends evolving towards 2025
- Team up: Think across humanitarian, business and academic expertise
- Think aloud: Reflect together on how humanitarian action needs to develop to be well positioned for 2025

The 2025 Consumer – Likely Trends in Health Care Services

Jeroen Tas, CEO of Healthcare Informatics, Services & Solutions, at Philips highlighted some of the exponential changes which are taking place in the provision of health care as a result of technology, while recognising that institutional adaptation and adoption is much slower. He described health care services as being at a cross roads with a system designed to respond to acute care needs disconnected from the fact that the bulk of health care expenditure is going to chronic conditions; the realisation that the OECD health care models are not addressing the needs of emerging economies and a technological revolution which is opening whole new opportunities in terms of health care. Mr Tas presented a vision of health care based on a much stronger involvement of the individual patient, or rather health consumer, in their own health, with patient-centric solutions based on the use of digital and mobile technology across primary care units, hospitals, physicians, insurance, pharmaceuticals and consumers; tele-health based on data-analytics; a sound information management infrastructure where better and faster data supports sound decision making and resource allocations and a sustainable business model, in which all stakeholders have incentives to improve population health.

<u>The discussion revolved around the following main points:</u>

- The vision for the future which was presented would only apply to those better off, leaving aside the poor and disenfranchised. How could this vision apply to all, regardless of large inequalities?
- Some felt that the provision of health care could not be considered outside of a larger social development framework.
- What will health care look like in areas such as South Sudan, eastern DRC, Afghanistan, Yemen in 10 years' time?
- The question of confidentiality of medical information was also raised, asking who would make the decision of what information to share and with whom. Concerns were expressed that the use of new data and communication technologies should not put patients and communities at risk.
- No business model is perfect for ever. Health care models all have their limitations, as those which were deemed to be perfectly suited at one point in time such as the NHS in the UK have shown. How do we construct systems which develop and adapt as required over time?
- Can we be sure that more direct patient monitoring results in better health care for patients? A direct link between those who are monitored and the health service providers has to be kept.

The 2025 Communicator – Shifting Power to Aid Recipients

Dr Sharath Srinivasan, Director, University of Cambridge's Center of Governance and Human Rights, argued that there is a fundamental change underway in the underlying drivers of humanitarian crises and responses, which is likely to be a reality in 2025. He contended that a communication crisis lies at the heart of a humanitarian crisis and argued that the digital communication revolution – the transformation of connectivity and information flows brought about through mobile phones and the internet – is a structural change to the communication landscape which changes the nature and scope of what is a 'humanitarian' situation. Humanitarian operations will have new opportunities to address needs, enabled by better information flows and two–way communications flows will be at the heart of an effective response. Power relations will also shift in the direction of affected populations, who will be more informed, and will demand more information and greater choice: 'aid shopping' will be morally acceptable, accountability more visible and public (think 'trip advisor').

As a consequence of greater connectivity through new corporate-owned communication infrastructure, a range of actors operating in the 'normal' economy and society will be able to engage in the humanitarian response along different and new lines, as risk / return becomes calculable, products and delivery can be priced, big data analysed, scenarios predicted, risks insured, portfolios

managed, etc. This will mean that reachable and accessible populations affected by crisis in less politically complex crises will likely be marketised by non-humanitarian actors; and that risk management and insurance will feature more prominently in preparedness, planning and financing of disaster response.

Greater connectivity will also enable new socioeconomic power relations, as on the one hand, consumers can stay consumers or even be created, and on the other, where connectivity is resilient, citizens with rights can more easily stay citizens with rights and solidarities can be mobilised. As a consequence, the language of 'affected populations' will be less tenable and humanitarianism will be more subject to economic logics, such as value for money, consumer satisfaction, etc. and political logics, such as rights, responsive demand-led governance, transparency and accountability.

In some senses, the 'humanitarian' situation will shrink in scope and be changed in nature, but a distinctly familiar humanitarian domain will remain in complex humanitarian emergencies, politically challenging environments, messy conflicts, forgotten, difficult and smaller crises, most vulnerable groups in major disasters. The humanitarian imperative will remain when and whenever basic humanitarian needs are unmet, a central driver of humanitarian action in 2025.

<u>The discussion revolved around the following main points:</u>

- In the future, we may need to change the boundaries of humanitarian crises that humanitarian actors focus on.
- Better communication means that humanitarian responses can more easily be broken down into different segments, where more structured businesses have a role to play.
- There are new risks and threats which come with the digital communication revolution, privacy of data, hijacking of humanitarian messaging by social media, etc. Protection of most vulnerable in terms of use of information will become an ever more critical issue for humanitarian aid providers.
- For humanitarian organisations, there may also be a power shift in terms of their intermediary role between donors and affected populations. The question increasingly may be about who owns and controls access to the big data.
- Humanitarian actors have a role to play in enabling and protecting the rebalancing of power towards 'affected populations' which is coming with digital communications.

Moving Stuff in 2025 – Drones and leap-frog logistics in Africa

Mr Jonathan Ledgard, Director, Future Africa, Ecole Polytechnique de Lausanne and former Africa Correspondent for The Economist, contended that Africa will benefit significantly from developments in the field of robotics. He proposed a vision for 2025 in which Africa's interconnected economies will be grounded in 'moving stuff', namely sharing goods and services based on drone and communications technologies, rather than in goods manufacturing. He argued that currently the demand in Africa for delivery of goods is high, while delivery rates are low as a results of high costs, difficult logistics, poor infrastructure, etc. and, although robotics sounds counter-intuitive given the high expected rates of youth unemployment, they will offer African economies efficiencies they could otherwise not afford.

He presented *Red Line* a consortium of world-class roboticists, logisticians, designers and regulators which will be building the world's first cargo drone routes in Africa by 2016 and zoomed into the proposed developments in the Great Lakes Region. He showed that within 10 years the whole of eastern Kivu could be serviced by drones carrying up to 20 kg of goods over 200km or so, at a cost of 1 cent per kg, along air corridors and making precision landings, right on the spot of where goods are

needed. While these cargo drones will probably be too costly for delivery of food aid and other staples, they will rapidly grow the economy by providing cheap, precise and safe delivery of medium size parcels.

The discussion revolved around the following main points:

- Traditionally, the humanitarian sector tends to be slow at recognising the value of technology. Humanitarian actors need to find incentives to explore and take risks, especially as new generations are quick at taking up and further developing new technologies.
- Some participants felt that as most of the difficulties that humanitarian organisations need to overcome to operate are politically motivated, these will not be overcome by technological solutions alone.
- The key questions around who would operate the drones, have access to them and how to ensure equity between North and South require further discussion.
- In some contexts technology can becomes a status symbol, potentially taking the focus away from investing in development.

Thinking Aloud – what this could mean for humanitarian organisations?

Humanitarian actors need to start thinking of people affected by disasters as consumers rather than as beneficiaries. The technology is there for aid providers to be transparent and communicate their challenges and compromises, and to show that they are hearing what these consumers are communicating to them. Humanitarian actors have an essential role to play in promoting and supporting the shift in power which is beginning to happen away from aid providers to populations affected by disasters, and humanitarian organisations need to think through the consequences of these shifts in terms of their role, ways of working, partnerships and communications.

Increasingly new actors are going to engage in humanitarian action, based on sound business models and a risk benefit analysis. Humanitarian organisations' ability to develop successful symmetrical partnerships across sectors of activity and actors will be core to their ability to carry out effective and relevant humanitarian action in the future.

Pockets of people in 'off-grid' situations of protracted conflict and extreme violence, or of abject poverty and vulnerability, be they for example Internally Displaced Persons seeking protection in isolated areas, detainees in jails, or people living in highly insecure areas of mega cities, will remain out of reach of mainstream technology and communication developments. Responding to their needs will be more expensive, more risky and less attractive to those actors who are not traditional humanitarian front line responders. In these contexts, people in need's access to humanitarian assistance will remain the biggest challenge.

More specifically, on partnerships:

Open standards for humanitarian action are essential, rather than a 'one size fits all' approach, for the private sector to engage with humanitarian action and ensure that humanitarian organisations' expectations are met, communicated and understood as well as for people's needs to be communicated and understood directly, without having to go through intermediaries.

Trust or rather mistrust between humanitarian and corporate actors should not impact on our ability and willingness to experiment and pilot together. The questions to be solved are how to scale up and embed solutions into government systems, etc. when we are successful and how to resolve issues related to accountability, protection of privacy, etc.

The example of how MasterCard was developed was put forward as an innovative model of how interests can come together for the provision of effective common services. Banks jointly invested in technology, open standards and systems through MasterCard, which in turn provides a service available to any bank, MFI, mobile money operator, etc. in the world. This approach not only provides scale-driven efficiencies but also encourages both proprietary and shared innovation. For example, individual banks and partners can leverage the open standards to construct unique value propositions (this is how PayPal got its start). They can also take advantage of ongoing centralized innovations (like risk management solutions) that are accessible by all clients via the common network.

On harnessing technology:
An essential issue to address is that of harnessing technology to increase capacity and capability for humanitarian action without losing focus on affected people, so as to relate it to needs and use it at scale, and without risking that access to technology or not creates a gulf between different communities.

Humanitarians still tend to resist technology. Is it because they are still looking for THE solution, even though they understand that one size cannot fit all; is it because they are finding it difficult to think of a new business model, with beneficiaries at the center; is it too expensive, or is it because they are not the ones driving the technology changes? Maybe humanitarians should be investing in technology –savvy staff so as to start driving some changes.

There are some really exciting developments on the technological front, and the potential to put them to relevant and useful use from a humanitarian perspective, keeping in mind that humanitarian action often requires tailor-made tools and solutions, which ensure that affected populations are protected from threats and risks.

Managing Risks in 2025 – Who, What, and How?

Mr Martyn Parker, CEO of Global Partnerships at Swiss Re, presented an overview of the rise in economic losses globally as a result of disasters (armed conflict excluded) over the last 34 years, which also shows a slower but steady rise in insured losses, and highlighted the huge burden uninsured losses represent for the public sector. He then shared the diversity of some of the risk areas that insurers expect to be focusing on over the next ten years, namely climate change, health, pandemics, food security, self-drive cars, longevity, pollution, urbanisation, cyber-attacks, natural disasters and economy.

He projected a vision for 2025 whereby Chief Risk / Resilience Officers will have become omnipresent in private companies and governments as well as humanitarian organisations; risk financing and risk transfer will have become a routine way of working; and donors will have allowed investments in disaster preparedness and early action. This agenda is already being pushed forward through a number of different channels, such as the partnership for 100 Resilient Cities Initiatives, the OECD Methodological Framework for risk assessment and risk financing and a number of research and policy pieces promoting action to mitigate the impact of disasters exacerbated by environmental degradation, inclusion of climate and disaster risks into development strategies to eliminate extreme poverty and risk transfer instruments to increase financial resilience.

Mr Parker presented a number of innovative risk transfer solutions already implemented, including isurance payments triggered by the event rather than by an assessment of losses in the case of hurricanes in the Caribbean, a multi government drought insurance pool bringing together five

countries in Africa, crop insurance schemes for small scale farmers in Ethiopia and Senegal, etc. He then outlined a future possibility of prevention of epidemics and outbreak coverage.

Mr Parker called on participants to think of insurance in creative ways, as insurers can do a lot more than people expect!

In conclusion, he projected that such a Conference in 2025 would be attended by organisations and business' Chief Risk Officers, that the insurance industry and capital markets will routinely feature disaster risk management solutions and that innovative solutions will have sprouted, triggered by necessity.

The discussion revolved around the following main points:

- Do humanitarian organisations really need external risk financing, shouldn't they think of how to develop their own self- insurance schemes, based on financial reserves for example, despite the difficulties in finding the right balance, between allocating to a disaster and keeping resources for the following one?
- What level of risk analysis is required (granularity)?
- The notion of risk transfer is very empowering potentially, as people know what they will get and when. The question is how to cover costs, and leverage resources to pay for premiums that cannot be covered by the affected populations and governments. Donors should be thinking of financing premium subsidies
- How to respond to chronic events?

Leadership in 2025 – Who, What, and How?

Dr. Jim Pulcrano, former Executive Director of IMD, presented the challenge of effective leadership in an environment of unprecedented exponential changes, while incremental evolution occurs in parallel. He highlighted the fact that both leadership and management skills are required to ensure that leaders see the way forward for their organizations and stay connected to the day-to-day realities of the organisation they are leading. They need to be self-aware, understanding what they know, where their blind spots are and how their network might help them avoid biases. They must be willing to experiment, and able to keep on learning. Leaders have to be prepared to occasionally go against consensus, taking the risk of being seen as a fool if they fail, but knowing that always following the consensus means that there is little progress and improvement in the world. The ability of leaders to take risks and occasionally make mistakes, and provide an environment for their people to do the same, are essential. Leaders need a panoply of skills and styles, and the perception and courage to know which are needed when. When to stop and reflect, and when to use their reflexes or those of their teams. When command and control is required, and when others in the team, or the group itself, should lead. That's good leadership today, and probably in 2025.

The discussion revolved around the following main points:

- For humanitarian organisations, crises are part of the ordinary, and leaders have to manage the unexpected and abnormal as the norm.
- Humanitarian staff who operate in such varied environments have very different expectation of their own leadership, which are challenging to reconcile.
- Managing diversity will be one of the key features of humanitarian leadership in 2025.
- Humanitarian leaders are challenged by the fact that their teams come from a 'believer mentality' and feel huge ownership of their organisations' brand, and that the humanitarian culture is based on self-promotion. The combination of these can make it difficult to move

forward. Humanitarians need a cultural shift, internally as well as externally, and be prepared to be open about mistakes, compromises, what has worked and what has not worked.

- The command and control management approach is no longer appropriate, even in the army. The questions for leaders are how to share leadership roles within their organisations, and being prepared to deal with lack of consensus and being challenged.
- A lot of humanitarian work has become about quality control, reporting, etc., namely all the things which make humanitarian work more bureaucratic but also more predictable. The challenge is whether the right questions are being asked and therefore the right action taken, or whether humanitarian leaders are becoming more managers and less leaders and therefore compromising more?

Thinking Aloud – Reactions and final thoughts

Thinking about tools and how humanitarian action is delivered has challenged us to realise that affected people are going to be at the center of humanitarian decision-making in a way which is unprecedented, as they position themselves as clients of humanitarian action and as power shifts in their favour.

It has been exciting to discuss the fact that tools can provide better two- way communication between providers of assistance and affected populations. A significant challenge for humanitarian organisations is going to be that of progressing on inter- as well as intra-connectivity, and think through how much of their information they are willing to make available.

The challenges of humanitarian access in large scale complex emergency situations remain, and will not be addressed by technological developments, as they are political in nature.

Partnerships in the future are going to become ever-more important. Humanitarians need to move beyond the feeling that it's about them reaching out to businesses, which takes us back to the funding structure of humanitarian action. Some of the new approaches and tools which have been discussed will force us to overcome these funding limitations.

We've heard that the future humanitarian operational environment will be radically different from today's, also that humanitarian organisations are slow at recognising and embracing change. Possibly, this is because this sector is so 'value grounded', incestuous and self-referencing, that it has got a strong sense of self-preservation and is quite arrogant. Part of this is likely because humanitarians have a one-size-fits-all framework of reference, which is reinforced by language used, where everything is characterised as a 'humanitarian crisis'.

Incentives for humanitarian actors need to change, as currently they are all about size and safeguarding structures. Humanitarian leaders and staff need the space to take risks and fail, without putting their careers in jeopardy. Investing in innovation means that we are prepared to fail. The question is how much failure can humanitarian organisations afford?

Humanitarian actors are feeling a sense of urgency, as current humanitarian models are increasingly unpalatable to governments and regional actors and may end up irrelevant.

It's frustrating that humanitarian organisations have not embraced technology more systematically, despite projects carried out together with business partners. More analysis of why more hasn't been achieved is required. There is a lot of funding available for innovation and use of technology, but the fact that this funding is 'balkanised' into projects is actually counter-productive. Organisations need to come together to address this collectively, as this issue cannot be tackled by one agency alone.

Discussions have confirmed the importance of the work done in defining a core standard for humanitarian action, the recently launched Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS). It now needs to be promoted with corporate partners.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Yves Daccord shared his perspective on the Conference with participants, stating that he had found it particularly useful to de-contextualise the discussion on trends and thereby avoid spending time on projections of context and scenarios, as this is happening in other fora.

He stressed again the fact that we are living at a time of exponential change, in which the speed of change is what is different compared to the past. His main take away from the discussions was the fact that affected populations will increasingly position themselves at the center of humanitarian action as clients and consumers, with the means to express and demonstrate their interests and preferences, as power shifts away from providers of assistance. Humanitarian actors will need to work out what this means for them in terms of their role, ways of working and connections with others. They will also need to understand the impact of crises on communications and associated risks such as protection of data and privacy.

He further mentioned that there had not been any discussion of the consequences of this shift in power in relation to Non State Armed Groups, and that this was an issue which required further thinking.

In conclusion, he called on humanitarian organisations to think through their role, both in those contexts in which new actors are increasingly engaging in humanitarian action based on a business analysis of risk and opportunity, and in those for which far more risky, complex and expensive action is needed, to support and protect populations trapped in ‘off-grid’ situations of extreme vulnerability.