

Global Development Council
Challenges in Humanitarianism

This note was presented by the Global Development Council to the Administration in advance of the May 2016 World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul.

Background

In May 2016, the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul will convene to consider the challenges facing national and international humanitarian response. This occurs against the backdrop of global forced migration having reached a level not seen since World War II. Relief efforts are stretched, effectiveness is patchy, and the costs place an increasingly heavy strain on not only humanitarian organizations but global development as a whole. While conflict currently drives about 80 percent of forced displacement, pressures from climate change will surely further exacerbate this crisis.

The Council recognizes the broad spectrum of humanitarian issues and long-term challenges that need to be addressed and applauds the international community for advancing this process at the World Humanitarian Summit. Issues like financing, better protecting civilians on the ground, and more closely linking relief and long-term development are all vital. Consistent with the current scope of our work, the recommendations put forward in this note focus more narrowly on two particular challenges: the special needs of girls as refugees and IDPs, and how best to leverage greater private sector engagement in humanitarian relief efforts.

Meeting the Needs of Women and Girls in Crisis

Adolescent girls face particular challenges in situations of forced displacement, marginalized both as females and youth. Rates of child and forced marriage among Syrian refugees, for example, are reported to have nearly tripled, and the world has been similarly horrified by the sexual enslavement and forced marriage, particularly of Yazidi girls, by ISIL. Some 65 million adolescent girls are currently out-of-school, and half of the world's out-of-school children live in conflict-affected settings. In some cases, extremist groups are actively targeting schoolgirls for abduction and attack, as in the cases of Boko Haram in Nigeria and the Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan. In other cases, government forces themselves have attacked schools or used them as bases of operation, depriving children of their education. Given recent efforts by the Obama Administration to advance girls' education for those adolescent girls currently out-of-school under a new initiative known as Let Girls Learn, there is a firm foundation upon which to make specific commitments to girls affected by conflict and crisis.

At the Summit, global leaders and key stakeholders are expected to make commitments to support the implementation of the Secretary General's [*Agenda for Humanity*](#), a central theme of which is

the empowerment and protection of women and girls. However, we recognize that the Summit is the beginning of an important reform process, not its end.

Specifically, we see two broad concrete opportunities for U.S. global leadership in this regard:

As a stand-alone initiative and as a catalyst for action by others, the head of the U.S. Delegation should come prepared to [make a core commitment to protect and empower adolescent girls](#) as part of the U.S. humanitarian response at the High Level Leaders' Roundtable on Women and Girls: Catalyzing Action to Achieve Gender Equality. This is in line with the Agenda for Humanity actions under Core Responsibilities Two and Three; targets 5.2 and 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals; and U.S. commitments under the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, as well as the conflict and humanitarian sections of its new Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls. We recommend in particular:

- The Government of the United States should commit to ensure that adolescent girls are specifically linked to essential services and stand-alone programming in its humanitarian assistance that addresses their specific protection risks, enables them to receive a quality education, and empowers them to become involved in across the various aspects of community decision making that affects their lives.¹ This should include identifying and gathering critical information about girls in the earliest days of an emergency when risks may be the highest, as well as seeking girls' direct input in order to incorporate their voices into immediate service deliver and programming;
- The Government of the United States should commit to ensure by 2017 that its humanitarian assistance includes the provision of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, including for adolescent girls, as soon as possible after an emergency; and,
- As part of its commitments under the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies, the Government of the United States should commit to undertaking GBV prevention and mitigation interventions — including for adolescent girls — throughout all stages of humanitarian action within and across all of its areas of operation by 2018.

In addition, the United States is currently undertaking its three-year review of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (NAP). The United States should continue to demonstrate global leadership for adolescent girls by updating the actions and results under relevant NAP objectives to include this demographic, which has historically been largely omitted from the Women, Peace and Security agenda. In the spirit of the Agenda for Humanity and the U.S.'s new foreign policy on girls, the revised NAP should include:

¹ For more on this, see <https://womensrefugeecommission.org/resources/document/1078-i-m-here-report-final-pdf>

- An action to coordinate efforts under relevant sections of the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls and the Climate Action Plan;
- Actions to promote girls' agency, empowerment, and participation across various elements of conflict prevention, peacebuilding, conflict mitigation and recovery efforts;
- A specific action on preventing and responding to threats girls face in crisis settings - including gender-based violence; child, early and forced marriage and other risks – that emphasizes the fact that adolescent girls are a diverse groups with complex and intersecting needs;
- Actions to ensure girls have access to health information and comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services; rights awareness, education and livelihoods development; and all other relevant elements of U.S. humanitarian assistance and refugee resettlement; and,
- Actions to continually monitor and evaluate if U.S. government initiatives are reaching the most vulnerable girls, including adolescent girls who are internally displaced, married, disabled, out of school or refugees, and to adapt initiatives as necessary to ensure they are inclusive of such vulnerable groups.

This should include U.S. efforts in the context of climate and natural disaster related crises, the gender elements of which are not articulated in the current Climate Action Plan, and the climate elements of which are not articulated in the NAP.

Lastly, and consistent with the Council's body of work to date, we strongly encourage the administration to pilot and take to scale the use of cash-based programs that have proven to be effective, and cost effective, in humanitarian relief. Funding should follow demonstrated evidence that programs work, and there is strong initial evidence that the use of cash in humanitarian settings can offer life-saving assistance to more people while producing considerable efficiencies. Along those same lines, we urge Congress not only to support the use of cash in humanitarian settings, but to explore the use of multi-year funding in settings of conflict and fragility.

Invigorating Private Sector Engagement in Relief

There has been considerable discussion in recent months on the need to more deeply involve the private sector in humanitarian relief and efforts to stem the forced migration crisis. The private sector continues to be widely under-represented in humanitarian affairs, probably more so than in any other sector of development, and increasing its involvement offers considerable potential benefits, whether it be in terms of direct financial contributions, innovation, the donation of in-kind goods or services, or in using their direct operations and supply chains to employ greater numbers

of those displaced. Kudos go to the dozens of actors in the private sector that have already stepped up to make commitments in that regard.

But we also feel strongly that a partnership between the public and private sector has to make sense in real operational terms, and it should not just be about lofty rhetorical commitments. However, it is also abundantly clear that there is very limited practical infrastructure currently in place to facilitate and leverage private sector involvement in humanitarian efforts, and much of the interaction between the private and public sectors in this area remains episodic.

More often than not, humanitarian agencies and NGOs do not know how to best utilize what the private sector can bring to the table, only have limited understanding of their operations and capabilities and little time and resources to commit to further exploring this potential. On the private sector side, most companies don't understand what is wanted or needed from the humanitarians, and are unaware of who could best walk them through basic humanitarian principles or give them an understanding of the needs on the ground. But the challenge goes beyond simply improving information sharing. We need to develop a basic marketplace to provide companies the kind of feedback and signals they need to deepen their engagement in humanitarian relief and ensure that it is effective, and for public and private actors to collaborate in ways that begin to change the overall system of relief.

Given the success of public-private partnerships in a range of other sectors – efforts such as the Tropical Forest Alliance and GAVI spring to mind – the time seems ripe to launch an effective partnership in the area of humanitarian affairs and refugee relief. Ideally announced at President Obama's summit on refugees to be held during the September UN General Assembly meetings, this public-private partnership (perhaps named the Humanitarian Alliance), would bring together key companies that have already made commitments in this space with bi- and multilateral relief agencies and NGOs. Such structured collaborations on relief have already shown promise in more specific areas of relief such as the use of digital payments in disasters led by the Electronic Cash Transfer Learning Action Network and the use of technology through NetHope.

The public-private partnership could be launched at an official White House forum or summit ahead of the September UNGA side event, and would be supported by a small dedicated and stand-alone secretariat, staffed by individuals with appropriate admixture of private sector and relief experience and funded by ongoing members in this partnership both public and private. The work of the secretariat would be shaped and driven at a strategic level by a board consisting of representatives from key private and public sector participants. The secretariat would be charged with:

- Mapping the potential resources that private sectors actors might bring to the table, including through an examination of their supply chains;

- Engaging all parties in a continuing discussion on how best to maximize livelihoods and expand educational opportunities for the displaced and encourage policy changes that would support livelihood creation and educational access for the displaced;
- Exploring potential innovations in relief and how they might be brought to scale; and,
- Assisting efforts to make procurement for relief efforts as local, cost-effective and efficient as possible, which would be entirely consistent with broader efforts to strengthen support and capacity for local organizations on the frontlines of humanitarian response.