

EU-Switzerland co-chairs

High Level Meeting 1 July 2020 via WebEx Co-chairs' summary

The GHD co-chairs, European Union/DG ECHO and Switzerland, hosted the fourth High-Level Meeting (HLM) under their co-chairmanship. The meeting, held in virtual format on July 1 2020, was dedicated to the theme “**Promoting principled and effective humanitarian action in the context of the UN Development System (UNDS) reform roll-out: opportunities, challenges, gaps one year-on**”¹. The meeting was co-chaired by Paraskevi Michou, Director-General, European Commission’s Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), and Ambassador Manuel Bessler, Head of the Swiss Humanitarian Aid.

The meeting featured a keynote speech by **Robert Piper, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations Development Coordination Office**, followed by a lively exchange of views with GHD members. **ASG Piper** recalled the underlying rationale to the UN reform, to enhance coordination and cross-pillar synergies, noting how the response to the COVID-19 pandemic further strengthened the case for closer coordination. After 18 months of the implementation of the reform, progress could be noticed in several areas, notably strengthening the analysis capacities of UN Country Teams and a reinforced leadership role for Resident Coordinators / Humanitarian Coordinators (RC/HC), which resulted in a more strategic positioning in the UN system and at country level, and with benefits for humanitarian response as well (by virtue of the dual/triple hatted function of RCs). The reform has also resulted in greater humanitarian-development-peace cross-pillar synergies and collaboration, which has proved essential in the response to COVID-19, alongside considerable efficiency gains. Conversely, more progress would be needed as regards the reconfiguration of the regional architecture and of UN Country Teams in rapidly changing contexts. In order to reach the full potential of the UNDS reform in relation to humanitarian action, ASG Piper highlighted the need to do more in the following areas: prevention and preparedness, with a key role for the humanitarian sector in championing advocacy for greater focus on prevention; greater cooperation between humanitarians and national and local partners; a more systemic and strategic relationship with the World Bank as well as the need to better coordinate different financing and programming instruments.

In the **exchange of views**, GHD members stressed the need to ensure the independence and neutrality of humanitarian aid and cautioned that some preventive actions as well as engagement with national and local authorities would require a degree of political involvement that could put the neutrality of humanitarian action into question. While acknowledging the challenge and the delicate balancing act, notably in conflict situations, it was noted that preventive action could be extremely valuable when addressing natural disasters or in certain protracted crises. Furthermore, while humanitarian actors should be advocates for preventive action, they are not the ones in the lead of the implementation. Many participants stressed the need to do more in terms of capacity and leadership building for RC/HCs. In parallel, the need for humanitarians to develop greater contextual awareness of development considerations was noted. Good examples of engagement with the World Bank exist in certain contexts and notably in the COVID-19 response (e.g. solid cooperation between the Bank and WHO), but these need to become more systemic and generalised rather than ad-hoc. Collaboration and work towards collective outcomes to the benefit of affected populations was possible and necessary, starting from joint needs assessment and programming, without precluding differences in terms of implemented activities. The exchange of views confirmed the need and added value for continued dialogue between humanitarian and development communities. This would contribute to better understanding of the implications of the UNDS reform on principled humanitarian response. The co-chairs proposed to revert to this theme at a later stage to take stock of further progress.

¹ Though not explicitly targeting the UN humanitarian architecture, the UN reform process and the repositioning of the UN development system in particular, is a critical opening to improve the international humanitarian response. Assessing the preliminary impact on humanitarian response after the first year of implementation of the UNDS reform has been one of the four priority themes of DG ECHO-Switzerland co-chairmanship of GHD. The focus has been on assessing the preliminary impact of the reform on humanitarian response at field level.

EU/DG ECHO–Switzerland co-chairmanship (2018-2020) – Strategic outlook for GHD:

Due to the exceptional circumstances linked to COVID-19, the co-chairs offered to extend the current co-chairmanship for an additional year, in order to ensure continuity and a smooth transition while leaving more time to the successor Finland to secure a co-chair. Finland confirmed their commitment to take over the co-chairmanship next year.

GHD members welcomed the offer for extension and expressed appreciation for the work carried out so far. They **confirmed the relevance of the current priority themes** (counter-terrorism measures and humanitarian aid, promoting and ensuring respect for IHL, Innovative funding and delivery modalities, impact of the UNDS Reform on humanitarian response) as well as the need to **continue strengthening the engagement with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)** while taking into account the **impact of COVID-19 on humanitarian response** and lessons learnt.

Some additional suggestions were also put forward, including the theme of greening humanitarian response, protection and access, gender as well as considering how to feed into the reflections on the future of the Grand Bargain. The co-chairs confirmed the intention to consolidate the work done so far and will revert with proposals for the work to be conducted within GHD over the next year.

GHD members' continued collective engagement will remain essential to ensure dynamic and relevant donor exchanges in the GHD context.