



WEBINAR SUMMARY

“The whole is greater than the sum of its parts”:
How HCT members can work better together.

“The whole is greater than the sum of its parts” is a quote from Aristotle about how much better things are when many different elements of a machine, a system, or a process are working well, towards a common goal, rather than different elements working individually. It is very much about capitalising on synergies.

Aristotle’s principle reminds us that what one can do, many can do better, and this is surely true in a humanitarian response where many different organisations bring different and diverse skill sets, capacities, and expertise to provide assistance to people that critically need it.

However, the leadership of humanitarian operations face a significant challenge to bring the different parts of the system together in a way that strengthens our ability to deliver assistance effectively. But we do, as humanitarians, have systems and processes in place to help capitalise on the synergies: we have clusters, the inter-cluster groups, technical working groups, reference groups, etc. And, at the senior level, we have the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) that can provide the common vision and provide the platform for a collective response. The system exists, and with an inclusive and accountable approach to leadership it is possible to build a team spirit to capitalise on the synergies that exist, but are not always exploited, to collectively deliver a humanitarian response effectively.

The Peer-2-Peer project hosted a webinar with Mr. Philippe Lazzarini, Humanitarian Coordinator in Lebanon, and Ms. Geeta Bandi-Phillips, World Vision’s Director of Advocacy and External Engagement and an NGO member of the Somalia HCT, to hear their reflections and experiences on creating a spirit of togetherness to better deliver assistance with different members of the HCT working effectively together.

Panellists

Mr. Philippe Lazzarini

Deputy UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon, and Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Lebanon

Ms. Geeta Bandi-Phillips

Director of Advocacy and External Engagement, World Vision, and HCT member in Somalia



Mr. Philippe Lazzarini

Deputy UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon, and Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) for Lebanon

How have you managed to establish a spirit of togetherness in the HCT to make it work effectively as a team?

The humanitarian operation should not be seen in isolation from other assistance in a country. While it is important for the humanitarian operation to be based on humanitarian principles – humanity, impartiality, and neutrality, the ‘togetherness’ and function of the HCT should still be seen in a broader context, to the degree possible, where humanitarian operations relate to, and should reinforce, other operational realities in a given context.

It should be recognized that the humanitarian response is not the only response in the environment where we work. We also need to be aware of development operations, the role of political missions,

the stabilisation agenda, and other similar issues, and make sure the humanitarian, political, stabilization and development work is mutually reinforcing with other approaches in the country. This is clearly in line the UN Secretary General's Reform Agenda. So, the idea of togetherness and working effectively as a team goes beyond the HCT. But yes, it is important for the HCT to operate as a cohesive unit within this broader picture.

A first fundamental step to foster a spirit of togetherness is the need to establish a **clarity of purpose** for the HCT and to make sure the team members are aware of the HCT's core purpose i.e. to deliver life-saving assistance and alleviate suffering based on need, in the most effective way.

In regard to this, the HC should work closely with the HCT members to discuss extensively and in a collaborative manner that members are aware of the HCT's core purpose: a strategic decision-making body for the humanitarian response in a country; a collective unit for providing commonly agreed guidance and common messages relating to the humanitarian situation and response; and a leadership team that provides a common purpose to the humanitarian community and establishes a shared responsibility for delivering principled humanitarian assistance based on need.

This is easier said than done, however, and it is essential to establish a **common understanding** of the complexities that affect how we operate in a country in order to reach this clarity of purpose and how it can be operationalised. Once we understand the complexities, then it becomes easier to understand how the team can work together to address the issues and deliver the right type of assistance, to the right places most effectively with the available resources.

Having a common understanding of the complexities and the optimum way to work will help to develop a common agreement on a **division of responsibilities**. This common agreement, often in the form of a plan of action, provides clarity on how the different members of the HCT can contribute to the different pieces of a plan that are designed to address commonly agreed priorities.

Getting the basics right:

Despite the complexities of the situation(s) that we are confronted with as a team, it is important to also get the basics right and to **make sure decisions are evidence-based**, discussed and well-informed; to **make sure information is shared** promptly to keep all members up-to-date on issues and decisions, and to continually maintain a feeling of inclusiveness.

The HCT needs to have meaningful discussions to ensure that decisions are well thought out and based on solid evidence from the field. In this regard, in Lebanon and in other places where I have worked, the HCT has established '**specialist groups**' which bring together UN agencies, and international and national NGOs to have substantial discussions on a specific issue to help prepare HCT agenda items in advance and **make sure the HCT discussion is well-informed and well-prepared**. This type of preparation helps the HCT decision-making process, and also ensures that all actors are fully engaged in shaping decisions and have a level of ownership in shaping the strategic direction of the response.

Clear vision and predictable planning: the HCT in Lebanon has a six-month forward-looking calendar that ensures there is a clear vision for the response that HCT members, and the humanitarian community are comfortable with, have confidence in, and contribute to. This helps to keep the team looking forward and prepared for predictable, and less predictable situations that we can respond to effectively together.



Is it possible to spread leadership responsibilities between different agencies and NGOs to lead a humanitarian response under the general leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator?

The HCT and other actors in the humanitarian response have a wide variety of expertise and capacities, and it is essential to utilize this to make the response effective. In Lebanon we have identified **trends and issues** that need to be addressed, and **priorities** that need immediate action. In this regard different organisations have stepped forward, often based around their individual mandate, and provide leadership on different issues as part of a division of labour at the leadership level.

This includes, as an example, UNHCR leading on protection; UNRWA leading on issues that relate to Palestinian refugees, UNICEF on child protection etc.. These are quite clear, and to a degree an obvious division of labour that supports a team effort to address numerous issues in a well-organised and coordinated manner under the banner of the HCT.

The **division of labour** does not only relate to UN agencies in the HCT. There is also a strong NGO consortium, including national NGOs, that leads on advocacy issues, particularly related to protection and GBV. The importance of including NGOs in the leadership is critical.

The **HCT Compact** can be a useful tool to introduce leadership accountabilities to the HCT members to strengthen the inclusive nature of the response at the leadership level and make sure that **leadership is embedded in a team effort**, and does not rest only on the shoulders of the HC. The Compact is not used in Lebanon, but it is something that is being considered as a tool to support a more effective



Ms. Geeta Bandi-Phillips

Director of Advocacy and External Engagement at World Vision, World Vision (Somalia)

Can you explain the process and the concrete actions that were taken by the HC and the HCT members to establish the HCT Compact and convince the team that mutual accountability is a good idea?

It is vitally important to be **as inclusive as possible** when establishing a process such as the HCT Compact in a country. At least I believe this to be true for the Somalia experience, and something we did well. The STAIT mission (now known as the Peer-2-Peer Project) in October 2016 was an important starting point as it established a common desire within the HCT for a mechanism for mutual accountability between the HC and the HCT members. But this was only the starting point.

The HC organized two retreats with the HCT to ensure discussions and the process to establish a Compact were inclusive and, through a consultative process, included the thoughts and ideas of the team. This really helped to **bring the team together** in support of the Compact.

The retreats, and other side meetings, helped to build a team spirit and established a common understanding and **clarity on the purpose of the Compact** and what is expected of all of the HCT members in terms of their responsibilities and their commitments to a collective team effort to deliver assistance to the people in Somalia.

Having a common agreement and commitment, though, is one thing. But it is also important to **work out the details** of how the HCT Compact would work. This was done through a small team of HCT members that outlined the details of the Compact. The detailed description of the Compact was discussed and endorsed by the HCT, an essential step to make sure all team members were involved and felt included in the process.



Following the HCT's endorsement of the Compact, all HCT members signed off on the final framework which confirmed their support for, and commitment to a team effort to deliver assistance.

How does the HCT Compact work in practice?

The HCT members have signed a commitment that indicates the responsibilities and contributions of different UN agencies and NGOs to support the goals that have been established by the HCT, and thereby support a collective response. This includes spreading the humanitarian workload between team members and to take on leadership responsibilities, in support of the HC, on different tasks that contribute to the commonly agreed objectives that have been established by the HCT.

The Compact has established clear functions and responsibilities for different agencies and NGOs that are part of the HCT. This has helped the team to address strategic issues collectively, and has delegated responsibilities in a balanced way across the team.

The Compact is still in its early phase of implementation, and it is difficult to assess its effectiveness in bringing accountabilities to the level of the HCT (and not only the HC). But the intention is for the HCT members themselves to anonymously and impartially **assess the performance of the UN agencies and NGOs in supporting the collective response**, and not only to be accountable to their headquarters for the individual performance of the agency or NGO.

It is envisaged that a **light assessment** of the individuals in the HCT will indicate specific issues where more attention is needed to bring about a more effective humanitarian response. The process is in place, and only time will tell if this will strengthen the ability of the operation to deliver assistance more effectively. But initial indications are positive.

In this regard, I can say with confidence that the process that has underpinned the HCT Compact has definitely helped to build a **stronger team spirit in the HCT**, and there is a high level of optimism that the Compact will result in a more effective team effort to deliver assistance to the people of Somalia

The full recording of the webinar can be listened to and viewed on the [Peer-2-Peer Project's website](#) (embedded) and / or directly through the [Peer-2-Peer YouTube channel](#). Click the images to access the recording in your preferred format.