

WHITE PAPER- STRATEGIC ROUNDTABLES

Setting the scene for IDME and ES 2021

OVERVIEW

Setting the scene for IDME and ES 2021

This paper is a product of a roundtable discussion that took place at WHF New York on the 22nd and 23rd September 2020. In this paper, we introduce the issues discussed during the session, analysed the main statements from speakers and more importantly, how to overcome the major challenges faced in the sector.

We are now in the decade of action to achieve all of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (herewithin referred to as SDGs). While the COVID-19 pandemic has hindered progress on the goals, oftentimes highlighting existing inequalities globally. In the words of Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed who addressed the forum, **“The crisis has exposed the flaws in many of our capacity approaches and assumptions. As we respond to a different more complex set of challenges, it underscores the need for better social protection, economic transactions, universal health access, effective governance and strong institutions.”**

In order to achieve the SDGs we must innovate, change attitudes and partner with varying actors from the private sector and NGOs to civil society actors.

We must recognise that while we must analyse, bring new ideas and plan effective strategies with international actors, for policies to be successful they must reflect realities on the ground while supporting the most vulnerable globally.

This paper considers the outcomes, discussions and calls for action in the roundtable on **“Setting the scene for IDME and ES 2021”**.

In the meantime, we would like to thank you for your interest in the World Humanitarian Forum.

Important information about this White Paper

- This White Paper was authored by the World Humanitarian Forum, specifically aimed at participants, members and stakeholders.
- The issues discussed in this White Paper will be further discussed during WHF London, Davos and Digital Series.
- This White Paper is **not a consensus** of views from delegates of WHF New York
- This White Paper is **not an endorsement** of any position maintained by a speaker or delegate

STRATEGIC ROUNDTABLE

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Introduction

The world is becoming one where threats outstrip our collective ability to respond effectively. The complexity of challenges along with the cost of responses have made it increasingly difficult to emphasize activities after a disaster or accident has occurred. While governments and emergency responders have plans prior to any given crisis, issues regarding engagement of local communities and vulnerable groups to maintaining a degree of flexibility in planning, will hinder local communities in recovery, preparedness and resilience. While COVID has placed unique challenges on the humanitarian and crisis response sector, it has been particularly difficult for frontline responders, emergency planners, disaster managers and resilience operators. All of this has raised fundamental questions regarding how we approach crises.

Key Points

Emergency responders need to improve their engagements of the public and local communities. Emergency responders can better engage members of the public and local communities in resilience, recovery and preparedness of emergency and disasters. This is especially important because local communities are the first responders in most circumstances, they are there before a crisis and can therefore conduct many life saving operations.



Moderator

Ms Emily Hough

Editor in Chief, Crisis Response Journal



Speakers

Dr Albrecht Beck

Managing Director, Prepared International



Mr David Wales

Founder, SharedAim Ltd



Mr Andrew Staniforth

Director of Innovation, Saher Europe

We need to question how emergency services and crisis responders can better develop their communications and strengthen networks with these groups. Another element that needs to be improved is the culture of risk aversion along with training and exercise of first responders.

Leadership is of course a vital element of emergency response, we need more transparency regarding the level of resources that is available during a time of crisis. If we are to engage the public, there needs to be strong leadership and honesty regarding what support they are likely to receive, this will therefore enable them to make their preparations to respond to a potential crisis.

“I believe that strong leadership and that message of honesty about what support they are likely to receive, would stand them in good stead to really recognise the level of resource that is available so that they can in turn, and make their own preparations to respond in a crisis.”

Mr Andrew Staniforth, Director of Innovation, Saher Europe

Complexity and flexibility need to be considered as key when responding to a disaster. Despite the large investment in disaster risk reduction in preparedness for emergencies, there was a lack of preparation with little working in the region. Therefore, we need to ask how can we prepare in a way that functions in the end? For example, if we look at the disaster in Beirut, Beirut had numerous programmes running on preparedness constantly. However, in the moment of disaster, Prepared International received communications from the government stating that no action could be taken, demonstrating a lack of awareness, capacity and governmental leadership.



Speakers
Mr Albrecht Broemme
Honorary President, THW



Mr Mark Jones
Chief Officer, South Australia Country Fire Service



Governmental leadership is also another key point during the corona crisis in which we have seen strong responses from organisations which are supposed to respond to the crisis. However, these organisations have not necessarily received the room to be able to manoeuvre to react to the ongoing crisis. In urban areas like Manila for example, no action was taken regarding preparedness because it was simply seen as too complex and difficult to evacuate an area of approximately 15 to 20 million people.

“Cross border informations from specialists on the weather services will give better predictions and better information safety messages.”

Dr Albrecht Beck, Managing Director, Prepared International

COVID has demonstrated the importance of unified local and global responses. We are facing particular challenges to how we operate, while we might have better prevention, resilience and coordinated reaction, in reality we need to act locally but also think globally when responding to crises. Similarly, we are not using all of the sources of knowledge available to us. For example, the explosion in Beirut could have been avoided if the alleged cause of the explosion was dealt with before. Similarly, the responses to COVID have demonstrated that there isn't a truly global action plan in response to the pandemic, a global action plan would have saved lives.

We also need to vitally consider potential future threats, responses to these crises might be worse due to a combination of different factors, ranging from increased sea levels due to climate change and a loss of trust in governments. Therefore, we need to find new ways to use our large networks of crisis responders to be better prepared through exercises, virtual reality and artificial intelligence.

“You need to have strong leadership in place of exceptional characters that make disaster diplomacy possible. Meaning stepping beyond the normal scope and taking all the responsibility of personal responsibility for cooperating these communities with states or regions that are politically conflicting and seeing the common need.”

Mr Albrecht Broemme, Honorary President, THW



Planning to the point of breaking is vital when analysing current plans for emergency responses. When considering the impact of COVID across the globe, almost every area, region or country had plans for pandemic infection for influenza for example, but none of the planning seemed to consider a virus of this nature which was reasonably medically predictable. Firstly, we need more flexibility in our planning, Mr Jones encouraged the testing of plans, specifically to the point of breaking, where they don't work anymore. This is a vital area of emergency response because when plans fail, we know that the preparation has been compromised. While this is not politically attractive, time is given to develop plans for crises without the possibility to see whether they fully work.

COVID has heavily implicated that if a third emergency such as a loss of connectivity through the internet, it is almost unthinkable to consider the impact on emergency planning if this was to occur. Therefore, we need to consider pre-season messaging, for example, those who receive emergency communications in advance are those who are most likely to respond safely. On the other hand, groups that are most vulnerable are least likely to receive messages and are the ones who are most likely to stay at home until it's too late.

“I think the other thing about leadership is that we have to create permission. It's all very well for emergency managers to be the face of a crisis. But the most important time in which we make our policy is when the crisis isn't happening.”

Mr Mark Jones, Chief Officer, South Australia Country Fire Service

The public are always the first responders in any given crisis. Assisting with organisational improvement and particularly customer experience from a human perspective is a necessary improvement. In a world where technology increasingly dominates human understanding and interaction, we need to consider the role of the public and how they respond to emergencies such as house fires. Indeed, the way the public experiences an emergency is vastly different from that of a first responder. As a former firefighter, Mr Wales was trained, had the support and knew how to respond, however, of course, a member of the public was not expecting a vast disruption to their lives which is, of course, an emotionally damaging experience.



This causes a disconnect between the emergency responder's assumed behaviour of the public and the public's actual response to an emergency. Therefore, we need to consider the public's role, especially with regards to research in which the public is oftentimes not recognised in data and therefore they become invisible in policy decisions, this results in a disconnect in the first responder's assumptions and the reality of what the public does in response to a crisis. This also seriously hinders our ability to innovate because by not understanding an event from the public's perspective we do not take into account the multiple different ways in which a crisis is experienced.

“I think how we use professional services and resources, is where we need to really change going from command to control to more empowering in enabling communities and being there to support them, rather than directing the way that we perhaps have before.”

Mr David Wales, Founder, SharedAim Ltd



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Conclusion

In a world of increased crises and instability, emergency and first responders have been critically affected. While planning has taken place globally, many countries have been completely unprepared for the pandemic, bringing vital questions to light regarding preparedness, resilience and responsiveness. Effective and honest governmental leadership is essential for this, while keeping in mind the need for flexibility of first responders. Similarly, we must also aim to engage affected communities, they are often the first to respond to any given crisis, by engaging these communities with effective messaging during and prior to a crisis we can enable them to create their own response plans, increasing overall preparedness.

