

Report

# Engaging with Communities on the Frontlines

3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting of Frontline Humanitarian Negotiators  
4-5 December 2018, Geneva, Switzerland



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## **The Centre of Competence on Humanitarian Negotiation**

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The Centre of Competence on Humanitarian Negotiation is a joint initiative of the ICRC, HD, MSF, UNHCR and WFP. It was established in 2016 to provide concrete opportunities for frontline humanitarian negotiators to share and analyse their negotiation practices, to build practitioners' capacity to address recurring challenges and dilemmas in humanitarian negotiation, and to foster peer-to-peer exchange across agencies and regions in a safe environment. Its core objectives are:

- To foster a community of professionals engaged in frontline humanitarian negotiations;
- To promote critical reflection, learning and exchanges among peers within this community;
- To develop a stronger analytical framework and greater capacity for effective practice.

While its activities are designed primarily to support professional staff from the five organizations, activities are open to the participation of professionals from all humanitarian organizations active on the frontlines of conflict.

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Front cover picture: Rohingya refugees carry wood and other items in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh (lonel Sorin Furcoi / Alamy Stock Photo)

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### **Acronym list**

CCHN	Centre of Competence on Humanitarian Negotiation
HD	Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IRW	Islamic Relief Worldwide
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
WFP	World Food Programme

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**This report summarizes the deliberations that took place at the third Annual Meeting of Frontline Humanitarian Negotiators held from 4-5 December 2018 in Geneva, Switzerland.**

The overarching theme of the third Annual Meeting was “Engaging with communities on the frontlines” and the crucial role that they played in the design of the humanitarian response.

As ever, the Annual Meeting served as a platform for informal dialogue among humanitarian practitioners on this topic and on the challenges and dilemmas of frontline negotiations in general. Among the participants were both frontline staff and headquarters-based humanitarian practitioners and experts in humanitarian negotiation. All participants attended in their personal capacity and were not expected to represent their agency or organization.



**Over 250 professionals from leading humanitarian and other organizations, academia, governments, donors, the private sector and policy circles took part in the deliberations.**

Participants came from over 70 countries and over 100 organizations. Half of them were based in the field. The other half worked in regional hubs such as Geneva, Rome and New York. The largest groups of field practitioners came from South Sudan (12), Nigeria (11), Lebanon (9), Jordan (9), Yemen (8), Afghanistan (8) and Syria (7). 41% were women.

The event was made possible thanks to the support and guidance of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the strategic partners of the CCHN.

The meeting opened with a series of **keynote speeches** by: Peter Maurer, president of the ICRC; Liesbeth Aelbrecht, director-general of MSF Switzerland; David Beasley, executive director of WFP; and Yannick

Roulin from the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. They touched upon the challenges faced by frontline negotiators and the benefits of the exchange afforded by the Annual Meeting and the CCHN more generally. Highlights of these speeches can be found in **Part I** of the report.

Participants then broke into smaller groups to address a series of issues in **context-specific and thematic discussion circles**. While each circle focused on issues relevant to that topic – challenges, good practices, areas for further collaboration – a number of issues came to the fore in more than one discussion circle. These included the importance of: (i) thorough preparation for any negotiations, and adequate research regarding one’s counterparts; (ii) ensuring diversity within a negotiation team in terms of gender, languages spoken and cultural and professional background in order to facilitate relationship-building; (iii) adapting one’s language and behaviour to the sensitivities of the counterpart; (iv) the role played by local staff in negotiations and in humanitarian action more generally, but also of ensuring that they had adequate support and training; and (v) consistent principled behaviour to ensure credibility and build trust. **Part II** of the report looks at these issues in more detail before giving fuller accounts of the rich discussions in each individual circle.

**Participants broke into smaller groups to address a series of issues in context-specific and thematic discussion circles. While each circle focused on issues relevant to that topic – challenges, good practices, areas for further collaboration – a number of issues came to the fore in more than one discussion circle.**



Participants were given the opportunity to pursue exchanges with one another on these and other topics during a **series of presentations** that took place across the two-day meeting on a wide variety of subjects and at a **public event** at which five humanitarian negotiators shared personal stories from the frontline, illustrating the role of trust, leadership and diversity in frontline negotiations. **Part III** of the report gives an overview of these events.

At the public event, the **CCHN launched its Field Manual**. For two years, the CCHN had been working with frontline professionals and operational managers from leading humanitarian organizations to analyse humanitarian negotiation practices. What transpired from the interviews was that there was a common practice. The CCHN Field Manual seeks to crystallize that approach, by offering practitioners a comprehensive model for conducting humanitarian negotiations in a systematic and organized manner. In an interview in **Part III** of the report, CCHN Director Claude Bruderlein explains more about the Field Manual and its objectives.

The **High-Level Forum of the third Annual Meeting** focused on the **importance of engaging with affected communities**, from the outset of an operation, as true partners in the design of the humanitarian response and on ensuring accountability for the services provided. A high-level panel comprising heads of agencies proffered their views on the matter before responding to questions from the audience who highlighted aspects important to them. A summary of the High-Level Forum can be found in **Part III** of the report.

The report concludes, in **Part IV**, with a brief **overview of the work carried out by the CCHN** since the second Annual Meeting, including feedback from participants in CCHN events, before giving a broad outline of **priorities for 2019** in relation to the three core objectives of the CCHN. Geographically speaking, the CCHN will concentrate on negotiation related to the following contexts: Lake Chad region, South Sudan, Colombia, Mexico, North-western Syria and Yemen. Thematically, it will look at: negotiation with peacekeeping forces in Africa; community-based negotiation in Asia; and negotiation relating to the protection of migrants in Latin America.

The CCHN also plans to create **specialized circles** comprising advanced negotiators who will share their experience of a specific context or topic during a series of gatherings over a 12-month period.

In addition, CCHN will build on the work conducted in 2018 by: continuing to foster current networks of frontline humanitarian negotiators and identify new ones; facilitating the sharing of experiences and reflections on humanitarian negotiation through field-based professional workshops and peer-support and peer-review missions; providing practitioners with planning and evaluation tools and experiential training materials; and training additional facilitators.

In this way, the CCHN will pursue its efforts to support frontline humanitarian professionals in building their capacity to negotiate safe access to populations in need and help them address the recurring challenges and dilemmas in this important domain of humanitarian diplomacy.

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## PART I

# Putting people and communities at the centre of the humanitarian response

## Introduction

The third Annual Meeting of Frontline Humanitarian Negotiators was held from 4–5 December 2018 in Geneva, Switzerland, on the overarching theme of “Engaging with communities on the frontlines”. Understanding that communities played a crucial role in the design of the humanitarian response, participants were invited to consider how best to leverage not only the social capital of communities, but also their ingenuity and resilience.

## Opening of the meeting

The meeting opened with a series of keynote speeches.

### António Guterres

Secretary-General of the United Nations

“It is encouraging to see the growth of this **vibrant community of practice**. Humanitarians are constantly on the frontlines negotiating access with parties to conflict and assisting the world’s most vulnerable people. Your work is crucial to saving and protecting millions of lives.

I welcome this meeting’s theme which recognizes the importance of engaging with communities on the frontlines. Through this annual gathering, you **build understanding and advanced solutions** to pressing challenges.

I wish you fruitful discussions and commend your determination to **reinforce the foundations of principled humanitarian assistance.**”







### **Peter Maurer**

President of the ICRC

“This 3rd Annual Meeting of Frontline Humanitarian Negotiators will look into the **role of communities as first responders in crises**. More than 250 participants from 50 contexts have come to exchange their views and experience. We are a vibrant community of frontline negotiators and this conference is a safe haven for informal debate.

We are bound by humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law, and we need to look at how these frameworks can make a difference on the ground. They should allow us to **strengthen our engagement with new actors**.

This meeting will focus on how we can **prepare for the negotiations of tomorrow**, improving practices and the design of what we do.”



### **Liesbeth Aelbrecht**

Director-General of MSF Switzerland

“**The ambition to place communities and people at the forefront is not a new concern**, but the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 and the Grand Bargain have acknowledged that the international community has fallen short of its goal.

**A change of mindset is required**. It all comes down to the resilience of vulnerable populations. The notions of proximity, humanity and solidarity are crucial for creating trust, yet challenges to humanitarian actors threaten their proximity to affected communities.

There is also a tendency for international humanitarian organizations to lead aid distributions at the expense of local organizations. We need to **create stronger relations with affected communities** to improve accountability to the people we serve.”

## David Beasley

Executive Director of WFP

**“When we have better access, thousands more people stay alive.** Negotiation takes many different forms and the partnership with the Centre of Competence in Humanitarian Negotiation has been very fruitful so far, because we can learn from one another.

**Our teams need to collaborate more;** the world is different now – more complex than it was a few years ago. Sometimes, a small thing that you hadn’t thought about makes all the difference.

I believe not only in humanitarian principles, but also in their **practical application:** that is how you save lives. We can also create pressure on counterparts by giving them the choice of being among those who help us to do so and those who don’t.”



## Yannick Roulin

Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

“Humanitarian negotiators need to observe everything in the context in which they work and **understand the interests and deeper motivations of the people** with whom they are speaking. Who better to provide that knowledge than local communities?

But **local communities also have to be protected** from the adverse effect of negotiations.

Frontline negotiations are important not only for reaching civilian populations, but also for **opening doors that might lead to the resolution of a conflict.**”



## PART II

# Context-specific and thematic discussion circles

## OVERVIEW

Participants examined issues relating to humanitarian negotiation in depth during a series of context-specific and thematic discussion circles. During the discussions, a number of issues surfaced several times and in various different circles. The main common threads were as follows.

- **Research and preparation are essential**

Before embarking upon any negotiation, it was necessary to build a relationship with one's counterparts. It was therefore important to prepare thoroughly, to analyse and understand the counterparts, their relative interests and influence, as well as their perception of the issue at hand and of the organization and individuals to take part in the negotiation process. Building a relationship took time, however, which could be a major constraint in emergency situations.

- **Diversity is an asset in negotiation teams, particularly for establishing common ground**

Preparing for a negotiation also involves putting together the most appropriate team, both in terms of profile and skills. Diversity in the composition of negotiation teams was considered vital, in terms not only of gender, nationality, languages spoken and cultural background, but also of professional and other experience. Diverse teams were more likely to be able to find common ground on which to establish a rapport with counterparts.

- **Cultural adaptation is required**

Part of understanding a counterpart was understanding his or her culture. That also enabled a negotiator to choose the most appropriate negotiation methods and the media through which to engage. Finding parallels between international humanitarian law and existing local values and customs, and using practical examples, could help understanding and build trust. It was more effective than a dry, legalistic approach. It was also necessary to be sensitive to the use of terminology and aware that certain terms might be politically charged for some.

- **Working with local staff and local negotiators is crucial, but they also need protection and support**

Staff from the same region or culture as the people with whom the negotiations were to be conducted were considered to be valuable, with their local knowledge and their ability to establish connections. That often meant, however, that local staff were the ones at the forefront of the action and the ones running the risks. Similarly, local organizations often implemented humanitarian activities on behalf of international organizations, because they had better access, but they might still be at risk.

Humanitarian organizations had a duty of care to all their staff and it was necessary to ensure that local staff received sufficient training to be able to conduct negotiations, even if it was only for their own benefit in the event that they found themselves in difficult situations with the authorities owing to their work.

- **Consistent principled behaviour is the key to credibility**

The importance of image for the success of a negotiation was underlined. Humanitarian organizations therefore had to protect their image by upholding humanitarian principles at all times. Caution had to be applied when deciding whether to act in a pragmatic way and any short-term gains weighed against the long-term implications.



## SUMMARIES

Below are more in-depth summaries of the discussions that took place in each discussion circle.

### **1 Humanitarian negotiations with non-State armed groups that reject principled humanitarian action**



**This circle tackled the main challenges and dilemmas related to negotiating humanitarian access with non-State armed groups that rejected the presence, legitimacy and operations of principled humanitarian actors. It sought to explore negotiation practices with such groups and strategies for increasing the acceptance of impartial humanitarian action in highly polarized environments.**

#### **Participants:**

- **Pascal Daudin (ICRC)**
- **Ayda El Ghouli (ICRC)**
- **Nour Kossaibany (IRC)**
- **Asmahan Mahmoud (UNFPA)**
- **Paul Skoczylas (WFP)**
- **Clarisse Uwambayikirezi (ICRC)**

It was highlighted that negotiation with non-State armed groups was in fact the last phase of a much longer process; a great deal of work was required before that stage, including: (i) mapping, analysing and understanding the group and its leaders, their relative interests and influence and their perception of the issue at hand and of the organization and individuals that would take part in the negotiation process; (ii) building relationships with the group; (iii) and developing a

strategy to influence its view based on rational, relational and emotional elements.

It took time to build a relationship in which negotiation was even a possibility and participants agreed that that was often a major constraint to finding solutions to pressing needs. Depending on structure of the non-State armed group – many were highly fragmented – it could take a long time to make contact with all the necessary elements. Yet, if the process were too rushed, or if wrong decisions taken, it could have a huge impact on the outcome of the negotiations or on the organization's staff on the ground. For the same reasons, it was important to choose the right team to engage in the negotiation, both in terms of capacities and profiles, such as gender.

### Discussion

#### **When pragmatism leads to risk**

A non-State armed group had refused access to humanitarian organizations on the assumption that their vehicles were being tracked to inform State-run counter-terrorism operations. A number of organizations had therefore turned to travel intermediaries – recommended and informed by the group – who knew the routes to take to avoid improvised explosive devices. With several organizations using the same service, however, and travelling in the same cars, it became impossible to distinguish between passengers at any given time and led to heightened security risks.

Being prepared for negotiations also meant being ready to accept an alternative option or to adapt the organization's approach to accommodate counterpart demands, as long as doing so did not contradict international humanitarian law or the principles on which an organization was based.

In that respect, participants discussed the place of pragmatism in humanitarian negotiations and its limits. While it was generally held that pragmatism was required to some extent, one participant highlighted how it could have unforeseen consequences.

It was stressed that caution had to be applied when deciding whether to act in a pragmatic way. In any event, for reasons of credibility, organizations still had to be seen to be adhering to the principles that they promoted to others.

Similarly, coherence of an organization's approach to dialogue with a non-State armed group was vital in order not to create confusion or affect credibility. The organization need to present a unified front and information-sharing among colleagues was important. Going a step further, one participant proposed that humanitarian organizations should get together, define a common language and harmonize their approach to dialogue with a given armed group, thereby increasing the likelihood of achieving results. Another participant pointed out that the extent to which coordination among organizations was possible would depend on the relative perception of each organization by the non-State armed groups in a given context. Sometimes, association with others could set back negotiations.



**Coherence of an organization's approach to dialogue with a non-State armed group was vital in order not to create confusion or affect credibility.**

Whether information-sharing was within an organization or among organizations, the key element was ensuring that the non-State armed group knew that the various representatives were aware of each other's conversations with the group. That would serve to reduce the risk of manipulation and instrumentalization of the humanitarian organizations.

Participants warned against taking too technical, legalistic and dry an approach to negotiation. They advocated finding parallels between international humanitarian law and local values and customs and using practical examples to illustrate the benefits of humanitarian action for the group itself. It was very important not to be perceived as a lesson-giver, but rather to exchange ideas and find common principles. It was also deemed crucial to have a trusted intermediary, especially when there was a language barrier. A capable and trusted interpreter was required as, often, the way the message was conveyed was as important as the content of that message.

Sometimes, the rejection of humanitarian action by a non-State armed

group stemmed from a lack of understanding of the intentions of the humanitarian organization. It was stressed that, whenever possible, it was important to include non-State armed groups in a continuous consultative or participatory approach on how best to respond to humanitarian needs, as a way of building trust and increasing acceptance of the action.

## **2 Community-based negotiation and mediation as a new avenue for humanitarian engagement**



**This circle considered ways to engage with communities to improve negotiation outcomes and build a more participatory humanitarian response. It explored tools and methods available to humanitarian organizations for developing participatory approaches that drew on local communities' capacities and knowledge.**

### **Participants:**

- **James Movel Wuye (Interfaith Mediation Centre)**
- **Muhammad Nurayn Ashafa (Interfaith Mediation Centre)**
- **Nancy Polutan-Teulieres (UNHCR)**
- **Oscar Sánchez Piñeiro (UNHCR)**
- **Dadang Trisasongko (Transparency International)**

It was stressed that, in many cases, communities had been conducting negotiations themselves before the arrival of any international humanitarian actor. Incoming foreign humanitarian negotiators, therefore, ought to function according to the principle of “do no harm” in order not to disrupt existing processes. One participant was of the view that the interventions by foreign organizations had the capacity to prolong



conflicts, change power structures by taking power away from local communities, and eventually sow the seeds of new conflict; it was therefore necessary for humanitarian organizations to provide safe negotiation platforms that rather empowered local communities. In response to a question about how to ensure the safety of those platforms, one participant explained that, in his organization, they had been developed incrementally, at different levels, and without any initial publicity in order to protect them.



**In many cases, communities had been conducting negotiations themselves before the arrival of any international humanitarian actor.**

Participants discussed practical ways to enhance community participation in humanitarian negotiation processes. They looked at their experience of peace-building to see what might be relevant for humanitarian negotiation. One organization had created “community facilitators” in one context to facilitate meetings of conflicting parties of different religious faiths living in complete segregation. The aim of the meetings was to produce a joint statement of the facts and a common agenda for the way forward in stopping the violence. Another organization had discovered that, in certain communities, people of different ethnicities or groups never met. Together with the communities, it had designed a park as an interface for all groups. The common space reduced the fear of “the other” and helped build trust. Yet another organization was working to reintegrate into society victims of conflict, such as former recruits of armed groups, aiming to break the cycle of violence perpetuated by the desire for revenge present within the community. In that context, one participant spoke of the proven effectiveness of “peace affirmations” that communities signed during “peace festivals” based on joyful singing, music and dance.

One participant stressed how important the cultural dimension of negotiation and mediation was in community engagement. Another spoke of basing conflict-resolution arguments on cultural norms and

communities' existing values, citing in particular the values of peace and forgiveness rooted in many religions; such values would resonate with the community and could lead to more lasting solutions. He also spoke of women as natural peace makers, capable of influencing their husbands and children, away from violence and towards reconciliation. Another participant emphasized the importance of including youth groups and their representatives in negotiations.

### **3 Negotiations between humanitarians, peacekeepers and local communities in crisis situations**



**Moving beyond policy, on the basis of personal experience, this circle examined the importance of and dilemmas associated with negotiations among humanitarians, peacekeepers and local communities.**

#### **Participants:**

- **Jean Baillaud (Themis)**
- **Olivier Beer (UNHCR)**
- **Caelin Briggs (World Vision)**
- **Christoph Luedi (ICRC)**
- **Ralph Mamiya (independent consultant)**

One participant said that, too often, humanitarian organizations felt that their principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence prevented them from talking with peacekeepers. In the participant's view, that was not true as long as they upheld those values when doing so. It was important to prepare in advance for such discussions and establish the boundaries and "red lines" beforehand.

Communication was key in all such situations. On one occasion in the cited context, there was a sudden attack and the local communities ran to the peacekeeping base expecting protection that the peacekeepers could not provide. That caused the project to collapse. Understanding one another's mandates was therefore essential. Humanitarian organizations had to be aware that not everyone would be familiar with their mandates or ascribe the same meaning to the terminology, specialized or otherwise, used in such circles. Another participant spoke of the risk of certain terms being politically charged, for one side or the other. Lack of knowledge and understanding bred fear and a lack of trust.

### Discussion

#### **A localized strategy for protecting civilians**

In one context, a humanitarian organization was repeatedly receiving reports of violence against civilians and humanitarian staff and, although negotiations were happening with the perpetrators at a high level, there was no progress. The organization concluded that it needed to engage with the peacekeeping mission in the country. Through weekly discussions with the peacekeepers and assessments with local communities, they developed "hotspot" matrices showing the zones in which recurrent attacks were taking place and the peacekeepers started patrolling those areas. The conversation with the peacekeepers then progressed further and covered not only implementation of the patrols, but also their effectiveness. Using this experience and the patterns identified, the organization developed a very localized strategy for protecting civilians, working with communities, also aiming to help enhance their self-protection methods.

When communicating with peacekeepers and local communities, humanitarian organizations therefore needed to be conscious of the language that they employed, as that would likely help them find common ground more quickly.

When talking to peacekeepers, given the overlap between humanitarian and peacekeeping mandates, it was useful to show that cooperation with humanitarian organizations would work in their favour. It was pointed out, for example, that humanitarian organizations usually had much better contact with local communities. One participant confirmed that sustainable results could not be obtained without the collaboration of local communities.



**When communicating with peacekeepers and local communities, humanitarian organizations needed to be conscious of the language that they employed, as that would likely help them find common ground more quickly.**

Another participant recalled the sheer size of peacekeeping missions. There were usually many components with varying experience and different tasks to conduct. It could be a challenge simply to find the right person with whom to talk, at the right level. It was also important to ensure cooperation among humanitarian organizations in terms of relations with peacekeepers; in contexts where there were scores of such organizations, it would be impracticable for all organizations to maintain relationships with the peacekeepers to the same degree. Another participant proposed the development of some strategic tools to achieve effective cooperation between humanitarian organizations and peacekeepers.



## 4 Diversity in frontline negotiations



**This circle discussed the relationship between diversity and frontline negotiation processes, with a focus on the need for sufficiently multi-faceted and culturally sensitive approaches to humanitarian crises.**

### **Participants:**

- **Wissam Alahmad (WFP)**
- **Reem Alsalem (independent consultant)**
- **Casie Copeland (WFP)**
- **Darikha Erketaeva (MSF)**
- **Hanalia Ferhan (ACTED)**
- **Nour Rady (UNHCR)**
- **Daniel Richards (UN Access Coordination Unit)**
- **Philippe Sacher (UNHCR)**

Diversity in the composition of negotiation teams was considered key, in terms not only of the languages spoken, but also of cultural background, experience and knowledge and understanding of the key players and situation in the context in which the negotiators were operating. Nevertheless, creating and providing to support to diverse teams was still challenging.

Staff from the same region or culture as the people with whom the negotiations were to be conducted were always valuable, with their local knowledge and their ability to establish connections. One participant, however, stressed that local staff were sometimes stereotyped as being allied with the host government in a country or the de facto authorities of

a territory, and therefore not given full access to information about a situation. Another participant warned about the transfer of risks from international to national staff, given the volatile security situation in many places, and recalled that organizations had a duty of care towards all of their staff. The issue of ensuring that local staff were trained to the same level as international staff in the same role was also raised.

### Discussion

#### **Never make assumptions**

A negotiator had been told that the military group with whom he was to speak hated a certain ethnicity and had been instructed not to speak his native tongue in front of its members. During his contact with the group, however, he found out that they liked a certain series of films that had been made in that language and was surprised by the unlikely common ground!

Frontline negotiation staff were aware that their personal attributes could be enabling or disabling factors in a given negotiation and explained that they would emphasize those that would be most useful and downplay those that could be perceived as problematic by counterparts. As such, few characteristics were insurmountable, but it depended on the situation. Regarding nationality, for example, one participant said that her nationality had helped her in many situations as her country was not militarily or politically involved in those conflicts and she, therefore, posed no threat. Another participant of mixed ethnicity explained that her origins had allowed her to be granted access many times, although her gender had at times restricted her contact with certain people.

On the issue of gender more broadly, several participants said that being female brought with it many advantages and regretted the fact that frontline negotiations were still dominated by white males. Women were often perceived by counterparts as being less confrontational and better listeners. In addition, by virtue of having access to women and children within a community, they were able to obtain a more comprehensive overview of the situation.

It was also valuable to have frontline negotiators with different a professional experience, who were able to understand the mindset of specific groups, such as staff with a military background for contact with military circles. Having common ground or speaking of a shared experience was found to be good entrée into conversation and an effective ice-breaker.

One participant was of the view that humanitarian organizations did not always appreciate the benefits of having diverse teams, although diversity would increase the likelihood of them identifying potential common ground with negotiation counterparts. One participant emphasized that the benefits of a diverse workforce were not unique to the humanitarian sector. It was proposed that organizations appoint focal points for the management of diversity in frontline negotiations to draw maximum benefit from it.



**Several participants said that being female brought with it many advantages and regretted the fact that frontline negotiations were still dominated by white males.**

Participants also spoke in personal terms of their experience within their own organizations. One felt that there was still discrimination against women in international organizations, which hindered their career progression. Another participant spoke of his experience as an advocate for LGBTQI communities in countries where having a certain sexual orientation was frowned upon or illegal.

It was also proffered that youth was sometimes seen as a risk rather than an asset in a negotiator.

One participant warned against basing choices in negotiation on assumptions, and emphasized the need to carry out thorough preparations, including with interpreters.





## 5 Negotiating in cyberspace: The use and impact of digital platforms in humanitarian negotiation



**This circle considered the new avenues of engagement and mobilization for humanitarian negotiation offered by advances in information and communication technology, along with the associated risks in terms of confidentiality and data protection.**

### **Participants:**

- **Khalil Al Khalil (OCHA)**
- **Chris Earney (UNHCR)**
- **Jonathan Harlander (HD)**
- **Wail Hashem (WFP)**
- **Charlotte Lancaster (UNOPS)**
- **Amélie Larocque (ICRC)**
- **Philippe Stoll (ICRC)**

Participants began by talking of how WhatsApp was employed in their organizations. They mentioned using it for: the first communication with contacts; introductions and basic communications in negotiations; arranging face-to-face meetings; general information-sharing and case follow-up; day-to-day dialogue and problem-solving.

It was useful for contact with people in physically inaccessible areas and appreciated both for its immediacy and for its ability to serve as a record of any conversation.

Participants were also well aware of the risks and potential pitfalls of using the application. These included the possibility of misinterpretation owing to the lack of physical cues; the possible of information being shared further, leaked or hacked, despite its encryption; and the

possibility of phrases being taken out of context or distorted and used against the sender. It was imperative that communicators bore in mind these dangers when crafting any such message. There was also the physical risk of losing the phone. It was therefore necessary to record and archive within the organization all conversations with contacts.

## Discussion

### **Overcoming physical obstacles with virtual tools**

One participant explained that his organization had used WhatsApp to engage with armed groups on the other side of a border that it was not authorized to cross. It had managed to engage with 40 different armed groups through WhatsApp, which had then led to physical meetings. A total of 35 armed groups went on to sign a protocol with the organization. WhatsApp, as a web-based tool, had a broader reach in the context because many armed groups did not trust the telephone network on the organization's side of the border.

Another participant had used WhatsApp in a hard-to-reach mountainous area affected by ethnic tensions and the presence of armed groups. There was poor phone coverage, but the internet connection was good. The organization was able to build trust with community leaders on the one hand and with the weapon bearers on the other. It was the first time that anybody had tried to communicate with them. The contact initiated using WhatsApp eventually led to the sharing of allegations of abuse with the alleged perpetrators with a view to preventing their recurrence.

Participants also spoke of other ways in which information and communication technology had benefited negotiations. In terms of data protection, one participant spoke of the strict policies of her organization, which applied to all contacts, State, non-State and civilian, alike. Furthermore, the tools employed were hosted on local servers.

It was pointed out that technology indeed offered new opportunities, but it did not change the substantive nature of negotiation. Key elements of trust-building remained the response time, the accuracy of the information shared, the language used and the management of expectations.

All approaches were based on an understanding of the counterpart. One participant expressed the opinion that it was easier to build trust through face-to-face meetings, where they were possible. Another spoke of the

advantages of employing a combination of communication techniques. Part of understanding the counterpart was understanding the culture of the context and thereby choosing most appropriate method or methods.

Regardless of the advantages of information and communication technology noted by humanitarian organizations, there were still contacts who did not consider the use of WhatsApp or similar methods as an acceptable risk through fear of being manipulated, tracked or otherwise disadvantaged or endangered.

### Discussion

#### Reducing risk-taking

One organization had received a request to support consultations with the population on the future of its country. It put in place various online platforms, including a website, that the population could access to fill in a questionnaire that would be discussed later on in the process. People could still participate without taking the risk of travelling to consultation meetings. The use of digital technologies therefore increased the inclusivity of the process.

#### Showing impact

A group of humanitarian organizations had set up a toll-free, confidential hotline, accessible to anyone with a mobile phone, to allow the population of one conflict-affected country to share their concerns and to receive information about the support available. The centre collected data and shared it with its partner organizations so that they could formulate the most appropriate response. The centre also published an interactive dashboard to show how effective the responses were. The community engagement helped build trust and improve acceptance, which improved access.



## 6 Negotiating the dignified return of refugees and displaced populations



**This circle considered the many challenges and dilemmas faced by frontline humanitarian organizations in negotiating the dignified return of refugee and displaced populations, including with host countries, countries of origin and donors.**

### **Participants:**

- **Rachida Aouameur (NRC)**
- **Ikhtiyar Aslanov (ICRC)**
- **Stephanie Ferry (UNHCR)**
- **Catherine-Lune Grayson (ICRC)**
- **Raquel Moreno (WFP)**
- **Alexandra Tohme (Azahir Association)**

One participant stressed that, in as politically charged a situation as negotiations on the return of refugees and displaced people, one of the most important roles of humanitarian organizations was to remind those in power that a voluntary repatriation operation should be launched only if conditions were conducive to people's return. The same message should be passed to the donor community, which played a major role in reconstruction, which was clearly linked with voluntary repatriation.

It was acknowledged that States were caught between their duty to uphold international standards and other national interests. Humanitarian organizations should ensure that international standards remained central to the negotiations. It was also stated that it was an extremely difficult proposition to align the wishes/demands of host countries, the wishes of

the people eligible for return and international law and standards, and all this against the backdrop of demands from donors to know about the progress of the situation.

### Discussion

#### **The importance of managing perceptions**

One participant spoke of her experience of a host country perceiving her organization's lack of agreement that conditions in the country of origin were favourable for refugees' return as fomenting fear among the refugees and thus impeding their return.

Another participant gave the example of a forum set up for humanitarian organizations to share information on negotiations with a certain government. The aim was to address, as a collective, rumours in the refugee community relating to returns, given that it took very little to spark a rumour that would affect progress.

One participant mentioned the protection thresholds developed by her organization to measure whether the conditions for safe return were in place, stating that humanitarian organizations should advocate that the thresholds be monitored by an independent and neutral actor. She also proposed that organizations should make their operational "red lines" clear during their positioning efforts, to reduce the likelihood of being instrumentalized. Another participant stressed that humanitarian actors should pay close attention to factors that might push refugees to return, such as the reduction of humanitarian assistance in the host country, and share concerns with donors.

One participant highlighted the delicate nature of the task of humanitarian organizations providing information and advice to refugees and displaced people without incentivizing their return or influencing their decision to remain. It was important that people remained able to take the right decision for their own particular circumstances. Another challenge consisted of making sure that the individual was placed at the centre of the response and that people were provided with a response that met their specific needs, not a general package.

One participant highlighted the fact that refugees and displaced people were rarely individuals and more often families, with a head of household that sometimes decided for the whole group. In some contexts, roles played out along gender lines and it was difficult to know whether the women in the household shared the view of the male head.

## **7** Shaping our negotiation approach: preserving the humanitarian operational space in South Sudan in 2019



This circle looked at a case study in South Sudan to spark discussion of the main characteristics and competences that a humanitarian frontline negotiator should have in 2019.

### **Participants:**

- **Kosimo Anthony (ICRC)**
- **Sandra Banks (College of Physicians and Surgeons of South Sudan)**
- **Vivian Caragounis (WFP)**
- **Will Harper (MSF)**
- **Angelina Nyajima (Hope Restoration)**
- **Francois Stamm (ICRC)**

One participant explained that in South Sudan there were scores of tribes and that humanitarian organizations needed to choose staff members from a tribe that had no stake in the specific conflict in which it was working, in order to work most effectively.

Another participant said that such separation of staff during a field trip was unusual. Mixed teams were a necessity, not a luxury, but he was aware that not all humanitarian organizations could afford to employ expatriates.

Yet another participant said that foreigners were treated very differently by the various tribes, giving the example of Rwandan international staff who were positively received as they had experienced genocide in their country. It was also said that, before they would grant access to international organizations, some armed groups requested people of particular nationalities to be employed by them. It was, therefore, important that organizations were aware of those demands and took them into account when formulating their approach.

### **Discussion In South Sudan...**

One participant spoke of an experience during a field trip several years ago in the north of the country by a team of resident and mobile staff. When it arrived at its destination, the South Sudanese members of the team were left with some of the arms carriers, while the expatriate members were taken to meet the commander. The South Sudanese staff were accused by the arms carriers of feeding the expatriates information about abuses. Held at gunpoint, they explained that their mission was neutral, independent and humanitarian. Nevertheless, it was only when they denied their tribal origins that the situation calmed down.

One participant was of the view that national frontline negotiators were still the most at risk. She also highlighted the fact that women were often good negotiators and mediators in African contexts, as they were listened to. The issues of whether national staff were given sufficient training in negotiation, however, and whether they were sufficiently prepared for their work in humanitarian organizations were raised.

For one organization, it was said that the national staff were in fact the guardian of humanitarian principles and of the organization's reputation as they were usual present in contexts for longest, while international staff rotated, were withdrawn or left. An organization's reputation was crucial for its success in negotiation. Humanitarians needed to be constant in their messages and proactive and creative in their negotiation approach as contacts did remember an organization's behaviour – both the good and the bad. One participant, however, recalled that in South Sudan the disparate nature of the country meant that what worked in one location would not always work in another.

## 8 Negotiating access to besieged areas



**On the basis of participants' experience of Syria and Yemen, this circle explored the challenges and dilemmas faced by frontline negotiators when seeking access to civilians in besieged areas and the limits of humanitarian action in response to siege warfare.**

### **Participants:**

- **Alhadi Albareedi (OCHA)**
- **Layal Barjoud (ICRC)**
- **Christophe Boutonnier (WFP)**
- **Elias Diab (UNICEF)**
- **Panos Moutziz (UN Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis)**
- **Ibrahim Olabi (Syria Legal Development Programme)**

Participants acknowledged that Syria was one of the most extreme situations where siege warfare had been used actively as a strategy to gain control. Although the existence of besieged areas had come to an end – thanks to a military solution, not a diplomatic one – some 1.1 million people were still living in areas difficult to reach.

Sieges were also under way in Yemen. Getting staff and supplies into the country was very difficult. There were two different systems in place owing to the existence of two different governments. Negotiation was required daily in a variety of locations.

One participant criticized humanitarian organizations, saying that they often remained silent in the name of operational imperative. In response, however, another participant said that denouncement was not always the best option: a combination of confidential negotiations and



denouncements was required. That was why there needed to be better coordination between individuals and organizations working on public advocacy on the one hand and confidential humanitarian negotiators on the other. Another participant said that humanitarian organizations often used advocacy tools and reports to support their arguments and thanked advocacy organizations for that.



**Participants discussed the dilemma of whether a humanitarian organization should accept a partial granting of its request for access and be able to help some people or whether it should hold out for greater access and risk receiving nothing.**

One participant questioned the emphasis on access, mentioning that efforts to negotiate an end of the siege should also be ongoing. Another participant said that, for that, understanding the overall dynamics of the conflict was crucial to see where there might be a possibility for leverage.

Participants discussed the dilemma of whether a humanitarian organization should accept a partial granting of its request for access and be able to help some people or whether it should hold out for greater access and risk receiving nothing.

One participant proffered the view that access was offered by an authority only if it could draw political gain from it; holding out for a purely humanitarian motive was useless.

Access was worth having only if you could make a difference. Two participants called for humanitarian organizations to make an honest appraisal of the impact of the humanitarian aid in such conflict situations on the occasions that access was granted to know whether it made sense to persevere in the long term in the quest for access to besieged areas.

One participant stressed the importance of image and of protecting it by upholding humanitarian principles at all times. Citing an incident in which his organization had been refused access because the authorities were convinced that it had political reasons for delivering aid, although the authorities admitted that it was needed, another participant proposed that there be greater analysis of previous negotiation experiences to inform future negotiations.

### Discussion

#### No action takes place in a vacuum

One humanitarian organization had had to negotiate for two years to take food and water into a besieged area. When it finally was given access, it got word that there was a shortage also of medicines. The dilemma it faced was whether to deliver the food and water or wait and negotiate being able to take in medicines at the risk of losing all access. It decided to enter. Afterwards, people elsewhere in the country took the operation as a sign that the organization really cared. Once that trust was there, the organizations began to have better access to hospitals and to community leaders in various other places.



## 9 Afghanistan: securing access in a fragmented operating environment



This circle dealt with participants' experience of Afghanistan in terms of engagement with the government and non-State actors to negotiate safe access and the protection of civilians. It also discussed the impact of counter-terrorism policies on independent humanitarian action.

### Participants:

- Masood Karokhail (The Liaison Office, Afghanistan)
- Hendrik Jan Lohuis (International NGO Safety Organisation)
- Nilab Mobarez (Afghan Red Crescent Society)
- Abdul Rasheed (Youth Help and Development Organization)
- Mohamed Sheikh (WFP)
- Christopher Stokes (MSF)
- Erika Wichro (Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights)

One participant highlighted that there were more than 20 non-State actors in Afghanistan, which meant that humanitarian organizations had potentially to adapt to more than 20 negotiating styles and multiple demands. Humanitarian negotiators needed to be dynamic and adaptable.

Maintaining a principled approach was also of utmost importance. Otherwise, humanitarian organizations risked losing, or never gaining, acceptance, which could put staff and operations in danger. One participant explained that representatives of the armed opposition had a very good understanding of the humanitarian principles and even

challenged perceived inconsistencies in behaviour.

Participants said that the majority of humanitarian organizations in southern Afghanistan were still operating in territories under the control of the government and that the bulk of humanitarian assistance tended to fail in reaching those living in areas that are controlled by the armed opposition. One advocated a stronger push from donors to work beyond government-controlled areas, acknowledging that that would require some difficult decisions. Another proposed that humanitarian organizations challenge the increased use of anti-terrorism logic and discourse by governments. Because of the constraints of anti-terrorism legislation, his organization aimed to fund its Afghanistan operation entirely with private donations.

### Discussion

#### **The danger of security being put before principles...**

Members of a mobile health team had been detained by the armed opposition, put in front of the local community and had their own information leaflets on humanitarian principles read out to them in front of local elders. The humanitarians were asked to explain what neutrality and impartiality meant to them if they operated only in cities that already had health facilities.

The importance of understanding conflict dynamics was stressed. One participant also spoke of the need to understand issues related to natural resources as local communities in Afghanistan were less focused on supporting a particular party to the conflict than on their access to water and farmland.

In order to reach secluded communities, it was proposed that humanitarian organizations needed to establish relations with the leaders of those communities in an attempt to gain their trust. Trust was the basis of any negotiation. One participant spoke of his organization's efforts to establish equal relations with the various parties and to ensure that each party knew that negotiations were taking place with the others.

It was also pointed out that in some areas of Afghanistan the system of social and customary status had entirely broken down and humanitarian organizations had to look again at who had the influence. It was also proposed that humanitarians look beyond the geographical definition of community and consider other groups, regardless of their size or geographical location, that had potential influence over the situation.

It was stated that humanitarian organizations also relied heavily on local communities to engage in negotiation on their behalf, but with insufficient consideration of risk transfer and whether the communities had the skills, and the leverage, to succeed.



**In order to reach secluded communities, it was proposed that humanitarian organizations needed to establish relations with the leaders of those communities in an attempt to gain their trust.**

One participant had noted widespread reluctance among humanitarian organizations in Afghanistan to share information on access and good practices and was in favour of more opportunities, like the present meeting, for exchange. It could help reduce the risk of humanitarian organizations being instrumentalized in the field and to raise their added value in the communities.



## 10 Negotiating with assertive States in the long haul



**This circle looked at how to engage with self-assured governments and at discussions that revolved around assertive norms of sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference, leaving little space for negotiation.**

### **Participants:**

- **Fahad Ahmed (ICRC)**
- **Darikha Erketaeva (MSF)**
- **Dena Fisher (ICRC)**
- **Birke Herzbruch (Trocaire)**
- **Myrta Kaulard (WFP)**
- **Daniel Richards (UN Access Coordination Unit)**

It was said that assertive States relied on vertical power structures to manage negotiations and exercised close control over negotiation objectives. Predictability, perseverance, transparency, focus and consistency were key to building a relationship and therefore to negotiations.

One participant considered that dialogue with such States could be more successful when conducted in an orderly, centralized manner, and that advocacy and public pressure could be counterproductive. Other participants expressed preferences for informal meetings, which were considered more efficient, or, where possible, meetings with someone with whom the humanitarian negotiator had a personal link or common interest. The possibility that assertive States could be susceptible to influence from other spheres was mentioned. As such, it might be useful to include commercial and private actors in a network of influencers.

It was said that certain subjects could act as irritants to assertive States; international humanitarian law was often seen as infringing national sovereignty, which led to humanitarians being looked upon with suspicion.

One participant said that, in one country in which she had worked, tourists had had greater access than humanitarian workers. Access difficulties significantly impeded the effective provision of humanitarian assistance and protection services for civilians and increased the time and cost involved in doing so.



**With assertive States, reducing suspicion and building a relationship took a long time. The rotation of international staff in humanitarian organizations could be a significant disadvantage in that process. Continuity could, however, be ensured by national staff.**

With assertive States, reducing suspicion and building a relationship took a long time. The rotation of international staff in humanitarian organizations could be a significant disadvantage in that process. Continuity could, however, be ensured by national staff.

One participant spoke of humanitarian assistance being delivered through national and local partners in a particular country where access for international humanitarian organizations had become complicated. Local organizations were therefore at the forefront of the action and the ones that were running the risks. Usually, however, they did not receive sufficient training to be able to conduct negotiations, including for their own benefit when they found themselves in difficult situations with the authorities.

It was nonetheless highlighted that local partners were often best placed to respond to crises and emergency situations as they had not only better access, but also better knowledge. Partnerships, however, needed to be sustainable; if many international organizations wanted to work through the same local partners, they became overburdened.

It was proposed that humanitarian organizations could work together to share information that might enable them to make progress with assertive States.

### Discussion

#### Pooling resources...

In one context, there had been so many humanitarian actors that, instead of each engaging in its own negotiation, they had established a coordinated approach to put them in a stronger position by being able to obtain an overview, see trends and negotiate as a whole.

It was pointed out, however that, in negotiating in the long-haul, there was a need to consider when it was the right time to make short-term gains that could be built upon, and when such gains could have long-term negative consequences. That might also imply individual humanitarian organizations having to turn down gains for themselves, such as access permits or an easing of import restrictions, if they could jeopardize the pursuit of more sustainable collective results in the long term.

It was proposed that the structures and practices of assertive States be analysed further. By mirroring their approaches, the humanitarian system might be in a stronger position to negotiate.





## 11 Building trust and credibility in war-stricken Yemen



**This circle discussed the complex and worsening humanitarian crisis in Yemen and the challenges of negotiating access to communities in an environment characterized by ever-decreasing humanitarian space.**

### **Participants:**

- **Rawia Altaweel (UNICEF)**
- **Sam Cheung (UNHCR)**
- **Peter Scott-Bowden (CCHN)**
- **Rasha Obaid (Falcon Coffees)**
- **Robert Onus (MSF)**

Participants spoke of the specific characteristics of the situation in Yemen that had a bearing on negotiations.

Negotiations were required constantly, on a myriad of security and operational issues and priorities. A very localized model of engagement was needed, adapted to the particular area, community and programme. Negotiations at the frontline were usually with non-State actors, but it was difficult to achieve access gains without external support, owing to the involvement of foreign parties in the war. With the increasing activity of the United National Security Council on the matter, greater consideration was also being given to humanitarian issues in the wider international arena, including among donors, which should be considered as stakeholders. One participant expressed the view, however, that political and humanitarian efforts to address the situation were not as well coordinated as they could be.

Humanitarian aid in the country was politicized as a great deal of funding came from parties to the conflict. Given this politicization of aid, there was a severe lack of trust in humanitarian organizations. One participant said that the international community was inconsistent in its interaction with countries that were both parties to the conflict and humanitarian donors.

Another participant said that multi-level negotiation and dialogue was required, but that not all humanitarian organizations were able to engage therein. Furthermore, it was a moot point whether individuals considered that there should be overlap between humanitarian and political negotiation as it was already the case and that had to be borne in mind.

### Discussion

#### **Can humanitarian work be outsourced?**

One organization, to gain the trust of communities to whom it had no physical access, used third parties from the private sector to carry out its activities. The third parties had more freedom to move around as they were from the community, but the humanitarian organization was unable to supervise them.

The volume of third-party service provision by humanitarian agencies and donors in Yemen was massive, yet it raised concerns such as the extent of the private-sector enterprise's commitment to upholding humanitarian principles and humanitarian agencies' duty of care towards the contractors put at additional risk.

It was said that being present was the only way to gain trust in Yemen; without proximity, it was impossible. There also had to be firm adherence to the principle of neutrality. Indeed, if there was no doubt as to the organization's neutrality, local parties and political actors would have no reason not to provide access. In that respect, one participant considered that humanitarian organizations needed to increase their presence in a variety of locations in Yemen, in order to demonstrate their neutrality and impartiality.

Transparency was also deemed important, for building relationships and understanding of humanitarian programming. That said, one participant stressed the need to find the right balance when involving and sharing information with the authorities, be they civilian, military or non-State actors. Too much transparency could be taken as an invitation to interfere.

In Yemen, the community, and particularly community and tribal leaders, or “wise men”, often played a major part in mediating disputes or in influencing behaviour. In many cases, however, leaders had their own interests, which could render discussions difficult. One participant said that chewing *khat* with local leaders was a way of building a relationship and social capital. Another said that her organization also mobilized imams to talk to local communities as their views were respected.



**In Yemen, the community, and particularly community and tribal leaders, or “wise men”, often played a major part in mediating disputes or in influencing behaviour.**

Several participants also mentioned the leverage that women had. It was sometimes easier for a woman to speak to actors on the ground and to speak credibly on behalf of women and children than it was for a man, and people tended to listen more. Moreover, for international organizations negotiation teams needed to include women as foreign men were prohibited from entering private households.



## 12 Strengthening the humanitarian negotiation approach in situations of urban violence



**This circle talked about the challenge for humanitarian organizations in Latin America to engage and negotiate with gangs in urban areas in order to bring assistance and protection to affected communities.**

### **Participants:**

- **Susan Cruz (Public Defender Service)**
- **Yolanda Zapata (UNHCR)**
- **Jean-François Veran (MSF)**
- **Marcia Vargas (independent consultant)**

It was stressed that gangs were in fact part of the communities and, as such, needed to be engaged. Humanitarian organizations, however, had to be very careful regarding the terminology they used. By labelling and treating gangs as criminal, they would be seen as taking the side of the State. They also had to beware of stereotyping; not all gangs were the same and they were often dynamic in nature.

One participant said that it was necessary to understand the specificities of situations of urban violence and find the right response, emphasizing that international humanitarian law did not apply. Another participant underlined the consistent number of people forced to leave their homes owing the levels of violence and that there were no camps for them to go to. People affected by violence perpetrated by gangs and criminal groups, people forcibly displaced and returnees were therefore often co-existing in marginalized neighbourhoods on the edges of the cities where the same or other perpetrators of violence were present and exerted

territorial and social control. It was also pointed out that, in some situations, corrupt authorities actually drew benefits from the presence of gangs and that that complicated the search for solutions.

One participant mentioned that, in one Latin American country, over the previous eight years, twice as many civilians had been killed than during the war in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the impact of the violence went far beyond those deaths and the associated trauma. The violence greatly affected rates of disease and health in general as it created access problems and led to the discontinuity of health-care services. There were even death threats against medical staff.

### Discussion

#### **A non-threatening approach**

One humanitarian organization had created an assessment tool and was seeking to generate reliable information on the problems faced by the population – not only the people with whom it had contact during the implementation of its projects, but also those who chose to not to take part and those that lived in areas in which there was, as yet, no such project. Using the tool as an entrée for discussions, it was able to negotiate access to communities. It had also been possible to establish direct contact with armed actors by interviewing gang members in their own homes about their own exposure to violence.

Such a bottom-up approach – listening to people’s difficulties, while producing first-hand statistical information on which to build the response – had proven to be a good community-engagement strategy and a way of engaging members of gangs without stigmatizing them. The inclusive nature of the approach also demonstrated the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality.

It was proposed that another way to engage with gangs was to partner with actors that they did not perceive as enemies, such as religious authorities or community leaders. In extremely difficult situations, humanitarian organizations could use trusted and effective intermediaries to inform communities of the services available to them to help boost their resilience.

## PRESENTATIONS

Participants were also able to attend a series of presentations and engage in further debate on a wide variety of issues. Presentations were given on the following topics:

**Behavioural analysis of humanitarian negotiations: a research initiative**

Anne van Aaken (University of Hamburg)

**Complex negotiations**

Marwan Mery (ADN Groupe)

**Building skills in humanitarian negotiation: an effective pedagogical method**

Claire Barthélémy (CERAH)

**Humanitarian access obstruction in Somalia: externally imposed and self-inflicted dimensions**

Emmanuel Tronc (ATHA/Harvard University)

**Community-based negotiation in a post-violence situation: a case of inter-ethnic relations in the village of Kuta after the 2002 Bali bombing**

I Nyoman Sudira (Unpar)

**Bridging the theory-practice gap for humanitarian negotiators**

Alain Lempereur (SciencesPo Paris)

**Income generation and the value chain as a framework for the design of international humanitarian responses in protracted armed conflict**

François Audet (OCCA/IEIM-UQAM)

**Practitioners and counterparts in humanitarian engagement**

Gerry McHugh (Conflict Dynamics)

**Initiatives of change: tools of personal resilience for humanitarian negotiators**

Barbara Hintermann (Initiatives of Change Switzerland)

**Theory meets reality: mediation in armed conflicts**

Eric Blanchot (Promediation)

**Strategies and skill-based methods to empower humanitarian negotiators**

Ron Ton (Clingendael Academy)

**WFP's new access structure in South Sudan: risks and opportunities**

Owen Davies (WFP)



## PUBLIC EVENT



During a public event with the title “Stories from the Front-line, the CCHN launched its field manual which provides comprehensive guidance on conducting humanitarian negotiations in a systemic and organized manner (see Part III). The event was opened by **Peter Maurer, President of the ICRC.**

Organized in collaboration with Initiatives of Change Switzerland, “Stories from the Front-Line” offered a rare glimpse into the work of frontline negotiators and the challenges they face in armed conflicts around the world.

After the launch of the Manual, five humanitarian negotiators shared personal stories from the frontline, illustrating the role of trust, leadership and diversity in frontline negotiations.





## PART III

# Launch of the CCHN Field Manual on Frontline Humanitarian Negotiation



The third Annual Meeting saw the launch of the CCHN Field Manual, which is set to become an integral part of the humanitarian professional's toolkit. CCHN Director Claude Bruderlein explains.

### **What is the purpose of the manual?**

The CCHN Field Manual draws on the first-hand experience of hundreds of field practitioners in offering a comprehensive model for conducting humanitarian negotiations in a systematic and organized manner. It provides concrete tools and a step-by-step method, called the Naivasha grid, to help humanitarian professionals systematically plan and review negotiation processes. This includes:

- analysing the negotiation environment;
- assessing the position, interests and motives of all parties;
- building networks of influence;
- define the terms of the negotiation mandate and clarifying negotiation objectives; and
- setting limits (red lines).

The manual clarifies the respective roles in these tasks of the frontline negotiator, the negotiator's support team and the person/organization giving the negotiator his or her mandate. It is packed with concrete examples inspired by real-life negotiations, step-by-step instructions and checklists.

## How did it come about?

For the past two years, the CCHN has been working with frontline professionals and operational managers from leading humanitarian organizations to analyse humanitarian negotiation practices. Through dozens of peer workshops, round-tables and field interviews with professionals across organizations, we have tried to understand better why negotiation is required, who engages in negotiation on the frontline, and how they do it. What transpired from these interviews was that there was common practice, which the manual seeks to crystallize.

## So, is the manual all that a humanitarian negotiator needs to be successful?

The manual assumes a core knowledge of humanitarian action, principles and law and some degree of proficiency in managing humanitarian programmes. Although it presents a linear model of frontline negotiation practice, it does not profess to be a one-size-fits-all strategy. Each negotiation is unique in terms of the operational environment and the people involved. Humanitarian organizations' mandates and internal regulations also have a bearing on negotiation processes. Ultimately, the success of the negotiation depends largely on the personal skills and sensitivity of each negotiator and his or her ability to build the necessary trust with the counterparts.

**We have tried to understand better why negotiation is required, who engages in negotiation on the frontline, and how they do it. What transpired from these interviews was that there was common practice, which the manual seeks to crystallize.**



In that respect, what also came out of the interviews was the need for a network of professionals to whom we can reach out when we face difficulties, thus increasing our chances of success. Thanks to the hundreds of humanitarians around the world who have been willing to share their experience and be open about the challenges and the ethical and personal dilemmas that they face, the CCHN Field Manual builds on

real collective experience.

### **What next?**

The Field Manual, as launched, is only the latest rendering of the main lessons learned within the community. It is expected to be an evolving platform for sharing experience. As the CCHN continues to expand its circle of participants through its peer activities, it is hoped that the wealth of experience will grow and further help to improve the capacity of humanitarian organizations to gain access to populations in increasingly challenging situations. Indeed, the binder format of the printed version will enable us easily to insert new content as it becomes available.

After seeking feedback on and users' reactions to this first version, we plan to prepare regular updates, so that members of the humanitarian negotiation community have the very latest in good practice at their fingertips.

#### **Contributors**

##### **A collective effort**

Development of the CCHN Field Manual has been possible thanks to the active contributions and continuous guidance of the strategic partners of the CCHN, namely the ICRC, WFP, MSF, UNHCR and HD. It has benefited greatly from the reflections of a series of academic researchers and negotiation experts. The generous support of donors has also been crucial, in particular the Human Security Division of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the German Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



## PART IV

# High-Level Forum: Putting people and communities at the centre of the humanitarian response



The 2018 high-level forum focused on the importance of engaging with affected communities, from the outset of an operation, as true partners in the design of the humanitarian response and on ensuring accountability for the services provided.

### Participants:

- **Peter Maurer**, President of the ICRC
- **Filippo Grandi**, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- **David Beasley**, Executive Director of the WFP
- **Nilab Mobarez**, Secretary-General of the Afghan Red Crescent Society
- **Reveka Papadopoulou**, President of MSF Switzerland
- **Mark Lowcock**, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator
- **Angelina Nyajima**, Executive Director of Hope Restoration South Sudan
- **Rasha Obaid**, economist and reconstruction expert from the Peace Track Initiative
- **Børge Brende**, President of the World Economic Forum
- **David Harland**, Executive Director of HD

Opening the high-level forum, **Mr. Maurer** said that humanitarians were not the first responders – local people were. During his visits to the field, he was constantly struck by the enormous resilience and creativity of the people, who always found ways to produce an income. He found it hard,

therefore, to understand why humanitarian organizations failed to build on that resilience to help people out of their predicaments. Humanitarian organizations needed to demonstrate that their support really did help people move away from dependence. Otherwise, it was possible that people would start refusing aid on the basis that it was not effective.



**Mr. Grandi** said that responding to a humanitarian crisis by providing aid and ensuring protection often required complex negotiations. Engaging in such negotiations, however, was not possible without a solid knowledge of the affected community so that real and sustainable solutions could be found. With regard to the return of refugees, for example, all strategies had to be grounded in protection. Effective monitoring was possible only if there was engagement with the communities and if the wishes of the communities were correctly interpreted during discussions with the various States.

**Mr. Beasley** agreed that humanitarians needed to be more creative. WFP was trying to create sustainability and resilience, for example, by allowing women in the Sahel to grow their own crops and by using hundreds of local stores in Lebanon to provide food to refugees. He maintained that humanitarian organizations should be able to speak of people's needs in crises without that being perceived as politicization of the situation.

**Ms. Mobarez** said that she was delighted to see increased political will to engage with local communities. She emphasized that the backbone of the Afghan Red Crescent Society was its thousands of volunteers and members. Without them, nothing would be possible. She asserted that humanitarians should teach communities how to be self-reliant instead of simply providing aid. For example, Afghanistan was currently going through a drought similar to one that had occurred 15 years earlier, but

humanitarian organizations were employing the same approach and had failed to evolve in their response.

**Ms. Papadopoulou** also welcomed the new political-level engagement, but stressed the importance of actual proximity as the basis for acceptance by the population. MSF strove to ensure that decision-making took place as close as possible to the affected populations because they needed to be responsible for their own health. In the 1990s, for example, when MSF was struggling to fight HIV, it realized that, if people acted only as passive recipients of the treatment, it was not nearly as effective as when they were actively engaged in the process.



**Mr. Lowcock** stressed that, when humanitarian organizations built trust with the communities that they were trying to help, the communities would mobilize themselves to help the organization if there was a problem. He also said that the simplest way to empower people was to give them cash: often they knew very well what they needed to do to solve their problems, but they lacked the capital to do so.

**Ms. Nyajima** said that communities were rarely asked what they actually wanted, with humanitarian organizations designing their projects themselves. That, however, was often detrimental to the success of the project. She said that it was important that humanitarians worked on the basis of the recipients' priorities and took their views into account, including those of women, which were often missing in discussions. She mentioned that it was essential to change the narrative on women more generally, including on respect for their bodies.

**Ms. Obaid** spoke of her experience in Yemen, where 70% of the people working in agriculture were women and where many of the combatants came from poor coffee-growing areas. Seeing a potential opportunity, she had gone abroad to study a particular for-profit company and how it tackled issues relating to the value chain. Its social impact policy ensured that producers were treated as economic entities and therefore as equals.



**Mr. Brende** underlined the importance of multilateralism and cooperation. He added the “fourth industrial revolution” was changing the way people connected with one another. The World Economic Forum had established a humanitarian investment fund with a view to strengthening communities as first responders.

**Mr. Harland** highlighted that, in many countries, there was widespread penetration of technology and he urged humanitarian organizations not to abandon the space that it had created. It could be used for two-way communication between communities and humanitarians.

Participants then responded to a series of questions from the audience.

Regarding what was required for **communities and humanitarian organizations to work better together**, Ms. Mobarez and Ms. Obaid spoke of ensuring that communities had access to sufficient information; Ms. Nyajima spoke of treating them as equals.

In response to questions about engaging with **actors that did not accept or respect humanitarian values**, Mr. Harland said that he had heard one donor, despite the concerns expressed by many, say that refusing to talk to people with different views delegitimized a humanitarian organization. Mr. Maurer spoke of the importance of a close

physical presence for protecting communities against the non-respect of humanitarian principles. In the case of radicalized communities, Mr. Grandi said that engaging with them could help humanitarians understand them better and therefore help communities conceive ways of addressing some of the problems that they faced. Mr. Beasley remarked that the approach in every country was different, but lobbying efforts with external entities that were able to exert pressure could be envisaged.



On the topic of **successful exit strategies** that left behind a strong community, Mr. Maurer said that humanitarians need to establish an evolving partnership with local communities as adaptability was key. Both he and Mr. Lowcock were of the view that external, international support was required to prevent communities from falling prey to local power struggles. Mr. Lowcock and Ms. Papadopoulou both mentioned the importance of providing capacity-building, for local communities and for national structures. Mr. Beasley spoke of providing adapted infrastructure for a lasting positive impact, so that humanitarians did not need to return. He gave the example of an area prone to drought and flash flooding where WFP had creating pods to be filled with water during floods and to be used to irrigate crops during droughts. On the subject of **climate change**, Ms. Mobarez said that it had become a major focus for the Afghan Red Crescent Society and she warned that water shortages would trigger many more conflict situations in the years to come.





Discussing the matter of humanitarian organizations being faced with **increasing bureaucracy**, Mr. Maurer said that it was partly as a result of increased risk-mitigation efforts: donors wanted guarantees of impact and efficiency and organizations sought to provide those by putting in place procedures and protocols that employees needed to follow. Highlighting that such controls were usually imposed from the top down, Mr. Lowcock advocated decentralization policies and the delegation of tasks down management structures, albeit while maintaining accountability. Ms. Papadopoulou recalled that that was the approach of MSF, which aimed to restore patients' capacity to make their own choices about their treatment.



## PART V

### Roadmap for CCHN activities in 2019

#### Taking stock of CCHN activities in 2018

In 2018, the CCHN continued to ramp up its activities, organizing a variety of workshops to enable the exchange of practical experience among frontline humanitarian negotiators (figure 1). Since its launch in October 2016, CCHN held a total of 18 regional and 11 context-specific workshops, offering practical support and the opportunity for exchange to some 650 such negotiators.

	Number of events	Number of participants
Regional Workshops	18	405
Context-specific workshops	11	250
Annual Meetings	3	589
Training of Facilitators	7	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>1273</b>

Figure 1: CCHN activities since October 2016

While two-thirds of the participants were representatives of the strategic partners of the CCHN (HD, ICRC, MSF, UNHCR and WFP), one-third came from a variety of other humanitarian organizations active on the frontlines of conflict, such as NRC, OCHA, UNICEF, UNFPA and UNOPS.

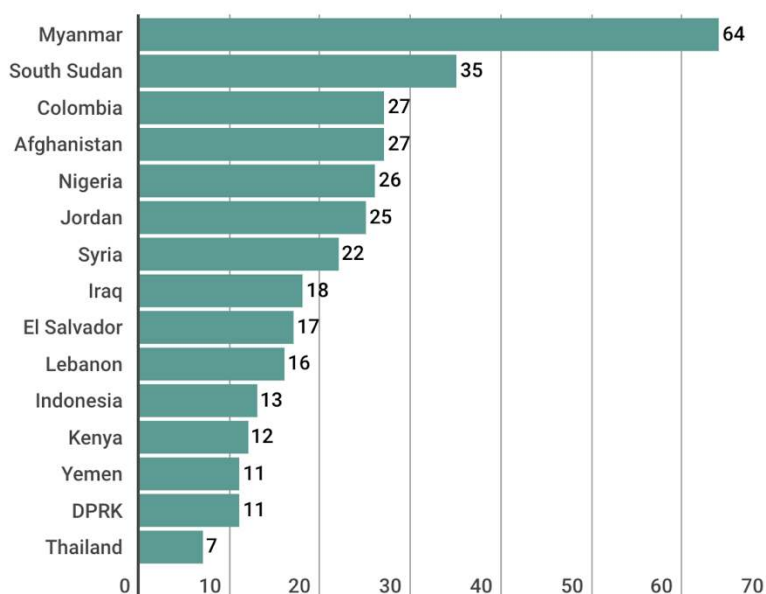


Figure 2: Participants' current location

Discussions at the workshops were extremely rich and varied, as more than 80% of participants held field positions. This allowed them to bring insight and experience fresh from some of the most complex conflict situations around the world (figure 2).

CCHN again conducted surveys after the workshops, receiving feedback from 135 participants. More than two-thirds found CCHN activities very useful in building their capacity to negotiate on the topic of access (figure 3).

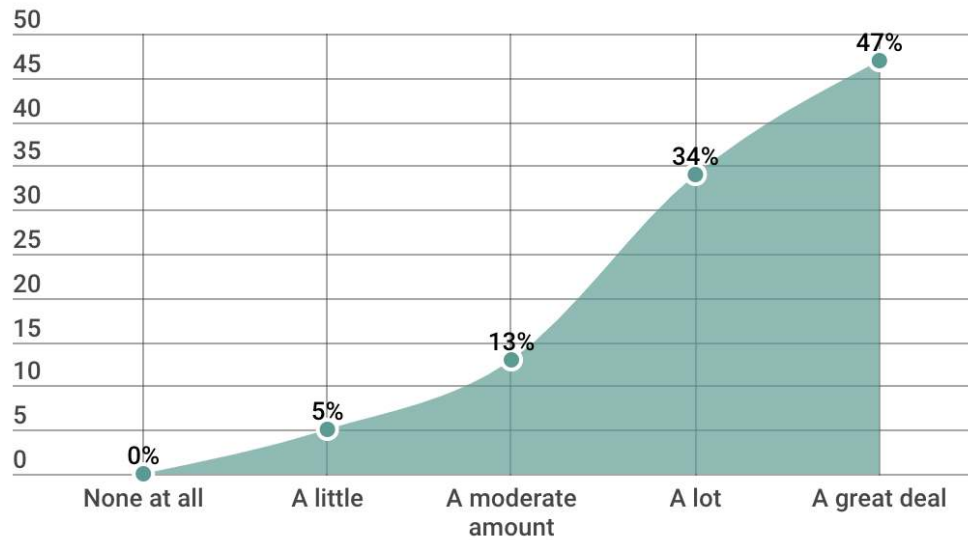


Figure 3: Usefulness of CCHN activities for building capacity to negotiate access

What also came out of the survey was the extent to which participants appreciate the opportunity to meet peers and build relationships so that exchange could continue outside and beyond official meetings (figure 4).

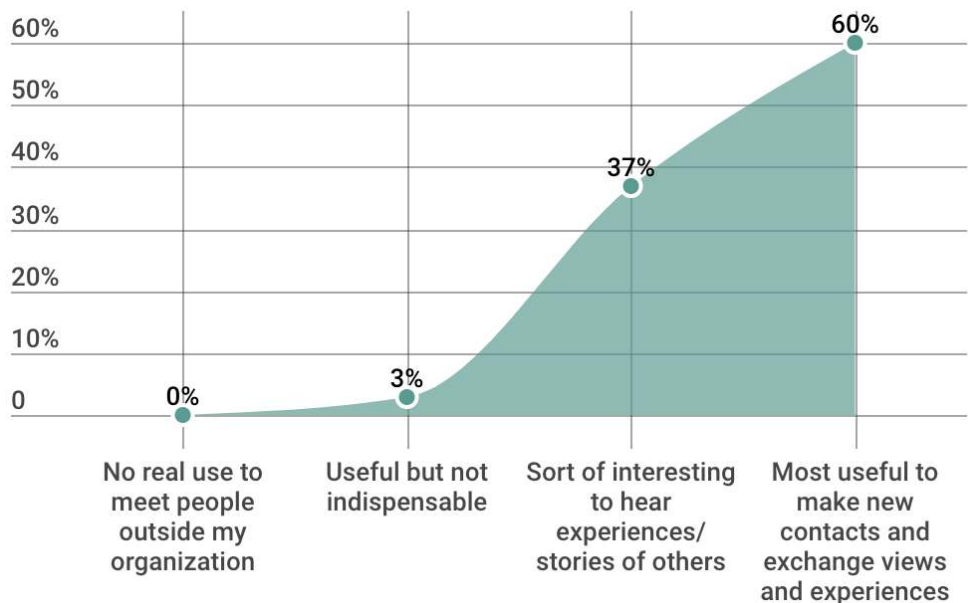


Figure 4: Networking aspect of multi-agency CCHN workshops

## Plan of action for 2019

In 2019 the CCHN plans to build further on the success of 2018 by pursuing its three core objectives in its four designated regions: Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East.

### Objective 1

**Foster a community of professionals engaged in frontline humanitarian negotiations, by:**

- Fostering current networks of frontline humanitarian negotiators in Asia and the Middle East
- Identifying such networks within Africa and Latin America
- Facilitating the sharing of experience and reflections on humanitarian negotiation through field-based professional workshops
- Encouraging the participation of individual practitioners in the development of CCHN activities

### Objective 2

**Promote critical reflection, learning and exchanges among peers within that community, by:**

- Facilitating peer-support and peer-review missions across the organizations in the strategic partnership
- Developing clear protocols for such peer-to-peer collaboration in a close dialogue with the organizations concerned
- Facilitating opportunities for the mentoring of more junior negotiators by senior negotiators at the field and headquarters levels, and establishing feedback mechanisms

### Objective 3

**Develop a stronger analytical framework and greater capacity for effective practice, by:**

- Analysing negotiation practices on the basis of contributions of practitioners collected during interviews and field workshops to identify recurring patterns across topics and regions
- Publishing short policy briefs, reviews of literature and case studies relating to humanitarian negotiation practices in close collaboration with academic establishments and policy centres, with a particular focus on the Middle East

- Providing practitioners with planning and evaluation tools to support their internal negotiation practices and strategies
- Supporting the development of experiential learning modules and training materials for humanitarian negotiators



### Launch of specialized circles

During the year CCHN will invite advanced negotiators from the community of practice on frontline humanitarian negotiation to be part of specialized circles. These circles will meet to share experience of a specific context or topic during a series of workshops over a 12-month period. Listening tours will first be conducted in the chosen subject to inform the content of the workshops.

In order to measure the impact of this 12-month programme on participants' negotiation capacities, they will be asked to complete a baseline assessment at the beginning and an exit evaluation at the end of the period.

### Region-specific priorities

On the basis of recommendations made during informal working group discussions and consultations within the community of frontline humanitarian negotiators, specific priorities have been set per region. While pursuing its peer workshops on all aspects of frontline humanitarian negotiation and conducting more focused sessions for frontline negotiators who have already attended such peer workshops,

CCHN plans to focus on the following priority contexts in 2019:

### In Africa:

- Lake Chad region
- South Sudan

### In Asia:

- Myanmar/Bangladesh
- Afghanistan

### In Latin America:

- Colombia
- El Salvador/Honduras

### In the Middle East:

- North-western Syria
- Yemen

## Training of Facilitators

In 2019, a series of training events for facilitators will be held in the different regions, with specific emphasis placed on ensuring the participation of Spanish and Arabic-speaking professionals.



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