Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

2010 Humanitarian Affairs Segment

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The panel this morning aims to look at the contexts where the confluence of global structural challenges are exacerbating vulnerability and driving humanitarian need. We also aim to examine how we can move towards a needs-based approach to humanitarian assistance.

This morning, I would like to focus my discussion in two areas

1. Data, needs and demography
2. How Communication can play a role in effective needs-based response

Data, Needs and Demography

Recently on 11 July we celebrated World Population Day. This year, some 60 countries are collecting data and counting people as part of the 2010 census process. A census is the only statistical operation that covers the whole population and all areas of a country. UNFPA – the United Nations Population Fund – and other partners are supporting this massive effort in many parts of the world.

Access to good data is a component of good governance, transparency and accountability. Population data helps leaders and policy-makers to make

informed decisions about policies and programmes to reduce poverty and hunger, and advance education, health and gender equality. **Solid data is also needed to effectively respond to humanitarian crises.**

But even prior to a crisis, demographic patterns can give us some indication on what may loom ahead. When applied appropriately, population patterns can give rise to **triggers** to alert Governments, as well as development and humanitarian actors.

SOME DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS THAT INCREASE SUSCEPTIBILITY TO HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES (WITHIN DEVELOPMENT CONTEXTS)
(As revealed by Censuses and Socio-economic and demographic surveys)

- **High population densities and sustained high growth rates within an area where a majority of the population depends on scarce natural resources for sustenance – when there are no escape valves present, can lead to displacement and conflict.**

- **High rural-urban migration of young persons from impoverished parts of the country into urban areas which offer no hopes for employment and availability of social services – this leads to congestion, increase in levels of crime and resentment.**

- **Unequal spatial population distribution where a majority of the population is settled in low-lying regions of the country (marine and river flood plains) which are liable to flooding in the event of prolonged rainfall, storms, hurricanes, tsunamis, etc.**

- **Unequal spatial population distribution where a majority of the population is settled on marginal steep slopes with very little vegetal cover. In the event of prolonged rainfall and flooding, there is greater likelihood of frequent landslides and mudflows**

- **In countries where a majority of the rural population is heavily dependent on rain-fed subsistence agriculture and animal breeding, prolonged periods of repetitive droughts could eventually result in declining yields, destruction of livestock, loss of livelihoods and famine and hence unleash waves of outmigration to other parts of the country and beyond which could provoke land disputes, ethnic conflicts, xenophobia, etc**

The theme of this year's World Population Day is "Everyone counts". To be counted is to become visible. This is especially important for women, young people and the elderly. Data that is sorted by gender and age can foster increased responsiveness by national decision-makers to the rights and needs of women, youth and the elderly to help build a more equitable and prosperous society. Sex and age disaggregated data is even more critical after a disaster or in

protracted crisis when we need to target assistance interventions and ensure needs are met. We have seen this in many crises and the Haiti earthquake was no exception. In fact, the elderly population was seen to be one of the most vulnerable groups in Haiti yet we do not really hear much about this group and their special needs.

A key impediment to an effective response to the crisis of internal displacement is the scarcity and unreliability of data. The information on numbers, locations and demographic characteristics is essential to identify IDPs' particular needs and appropriately target and tailor responses. It is also often difficult to determine who is an IDP, tell IDPs from local communities affected by conflict or disaster as well as determine when the displacement ends, especially in protracted situations. The nature of internal displacement makes it generally difficult for governments, international organizations and NGOs to register or otherwise keep track of
forced population movements and circumstances of the affected people.

What does this mean then to humanitarian actors? There is a need to engage with developmental agencies like UNFPA who have the expertise in data and demography and work closely with national authorities in this area. Post Haiti earthquake, when national databases were destroyed, UNFPA had the only remaining database – sex and age disaggregated for the country. Working closely with the Haitian Institute of Statistics, 100 youth volunteers were mobilized to assist in data collection and UNFPA continued to support the PDNA. This experience should be replicated and to this effect, UNFPA has recently produced

Guidelines on Data Issues in Humanitarian Crisis Situations which we hope to roll out globally, with a ToT approach, to strengthen national capacities.

Next, Can new ways of Communication help us better understand needs?

I'm going to come at this from a slightly different angle from what people might expect. Because it seems that there is a rather unexplored piece of the humanitarian world that has the potential to become either extremely useful to us, or very problematic - and the choice about which of these it is, rests very squarely with the current humanitarian community.

I want to talk about Hoteline Losana - who was rescued from beneath a collapsed furniture shop in Port-au-Prince eight days after the earthquake. As she was pulled from the rubble, Hoteline asked rescuers not for water, but if they could retrieve her mobile phone from her pocket so she could tell her family she was safe. Before she was even clear of the rubble, she was on the phone. The picture that appeared in the media the next day showed Hoteline being moved to a stretcher surrounded by USAR staff, her phone clamped to her ear as she told her brother she was alive. While we can argue that this was exceptional, actually, it wasn't. There is that anecdote which shows how much things have changed "How do you know you're living in 2010? When you turn round 5 minutes after leaving your house to pick up the mobile phone that you forgot - and which you didn't have or need for the first 30 years of your life!"

Communicating better with those we are trying to help has been a major gap in the armory of aid agencies for too long. Without access to information – from being able to find out if a loved one is safe to knowing where to go for water –

disaster survivors cannot begin to make the right choices for themselves and their families. Communication needs to better reach out marginalized communities e.g. indigenous populations and technology can assist us.

Survivors often don't know what their rights are. We stand back and talk about "protecting the rights of IDPs" - we talk to Governments about it; it's discussed in the Security Council. What better way to protect their rights than to make sure that they know and understand what those rights are and, when those rights are violated what to do about it? And this is not difficult these days - we have radio, we have the internet, and we have mobile telephones - the growth of which is far faster in the developing world than the developed. Interesting how it's sometimes easier to get a 3G signal on the west coast of Sumatra than here in New York City!

In Haiti, for example, radios were distributed aimed at a ration of 3 women:1 man. Listening patterns were studied and radio programmes were aired and targeted for women, elaborating their rights to health, protection, food what to do in the case of an emergency, broadcasting a hotline for GBV etc.   In similar vein, we need beneficiaries to channel to us what they know and what they need, so we can improve our responses accordingly. Information is a practical issue; it is also one of empowerment, of alleviating stress and trauma by helping people take charge of their lives, and improving the effectiveness of our responses to their needs.

I would argue that, for the first time (and perhaps only for those agencies who were really looking hard) the response to Haiti has offered us a glimpse of the

future world of disaster response, and of the communications environments in which we will operate, where even the poorest and most isolated people can connect to millions through the phone in their pocket. Think about it - Disaster survivors more able to communicate their experiences and needs directly. Tools that may hold the promise of solutions to some of humanitarianism's most enduring problems, such as the need for constant real-time information about needs and dynamics. The possibility for aid agencies, disaster survivors, militaries and individuals across the world to work together simultaneously. If we WANT it, this could revolutionize the way we do business, and could address, to an extent, some of the long term vulnerabilities that we don't seem to be able to crack. This could be a true melding of "business" on the one hand and the humanitarian and development communities on the other.

We must not allow new and emerging technologies to shore up the systems we have invented, rather we should start to rethink what a REAL two way flow of information could bring to our world. The Communications with Disaster Affected Communities working group is, perhaps a small first step in the right direction emphasizing, as it does TWO WAY communications with the people that we are trying to help. But much more is needed - engagement, debate, establishment of a modus operandi, perhaps some forms of regulation around how the aid community uses technology.

We need technologies and tools that are relevant not only to the established response-based humanitarian system – which is a challenge in itself as we saw in Haiti - but also to the humanitarian system of the future - a system needs to be

focused on national and regional authorities as the first line of preparedness, which should emphasize prevention and risk reduction at least as much as response. Let's think about creating really NEW partnerships among public authorities, civil society and business actors focused on building resilience at every level, from the village or town to the district and the country, and also at the regional level, to reduce the risks of natural hazards.

The tech community is out there, willing to work with us - Ushahidi, Crisis Commons and a host of others. As we saw in Haiti, if we don't work with them they will find other actors to work with (*in this case SouthCom*). Discussions since then have clarified that there are some real opportunities out there. However, this interaction needs to be **visionary on our part** - *reliable, predictable, principled and cognisant of humanitarian principles on theirs*, and **jointly focused** on achieving some real change to the way that we do business. We need to be coordinated in our actions - OCHA needs to lead on this and, in these tough financial times, needs to be provided with the resources to do so.

It's time for a rethink - otherwise we may someday wake up to find we have been left behind.

Thank you.