

Humanitarian Exchange and Research Centre (HERE)



Annual Report 2017



Message from the Executive Director

Quality assurance of humanitarian aid gained attention in the mid to late nineteen nineties with the publication of the Red Cross/Red Crescent NGO Code of Conduct and the Sphere Standards. Such initiatives have since become the benchmarks for measuring quality and accountability. That said, they need to be accompanied by other tools to enhance quality and strengthen humanitarian effectiveness. Reviewing humanitarian practice on the ground will reveal what works and what does not work. News on less good practices may not be so welcome or convenient in the eyes of donors and others, but for ethical reasons, humanitarians are always obliged to look at how they can do their work better. It is this element of always looking for improvements that motivates HERE.

In 2017, HERE continued to grow its portfolio and further developed its track record of reviewing the delivery of humanitarian response. In Iraq, HERE was asked to look at a range of agencies, which receive funding from ECHO, and to assess how humanitarian principles guide them in their work. When agencies say they deliver principled humanitarian action, one can wonder what this implies in practical terms. Is there a noticeable difference between principled and non- or unprincipled action? The Iraq review revealed that while all agencies consider the principles in planning and carrying out their activities, there is great divergence in the way they understand and apply them. Only a small minority of them, for example, consider that the aspect of most in need, which is part of the principle of impartiality, implies that they should deliver their services as close to the frontline as possible.

The analytical framework that HERE developed for this review, based on the four principles, has turned out to be a helpful tool in other research as well. Part of HERE's self-initiated activities is a project that examines the differences and commonalities in the way nine organisations delivering humanitarian response set their priorities in situations of (protracted) armed conflict. This study sheds light on the question whether there is complementarity among organisations, or how this could be better achieved. All of this to say that HERE's work does not only seek to detect gaps, but also to suggest ways forward. Usually the problem is not in the intention expressed or in the commitments made. It is in translating words into reality.

This annual report provides an overview of HERE's progress in 2017. It is understandable that in the humanitarian world the priority is on the delivery of services. Yet, as illustrated, to ensure quality and accountability in this delivery, evidence is essential. There is room for stepping up investments in organisations that like HERE seek to compile such evidence. For those who need to be further convinced in this respect, and for everyone else interested, we hope that this report contributes to making the case that closing the gap between policy and humanitarian practice is a worthwhile endeavour.

Ed Schenkenberg van Mierop

About HERE

HERE is a Geneva-based independent think-tank. In a world where humanitarian needs remain unmet, HERE's mission is to contribute to improving humanitarian performance in order to increase the effectiveness of humanitarian action. HERE drives evidence-based dialogue and identifies solutions for rebooting the humanitarian system. We create synergies by bridging action and policy, and by engaging actors involved in humanitarian responses. Working in close collaboration with operational humanitarian actors, we feed the humanitarian community with independent reports, policy papers, and studies based on applied, mixed-methods research and analysis with a view to influence policy, fuel debate and dialogue and change behaviour.

Our focus is on situations of armed conflict, where the most urgent needs are found. Crisis in humanitarian terms emerges not just from the existence of conflict, but in particular from its conduct. States and other armed actors consistently defy the obligations of International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law, with devastating consequences for affected communities and for the delivery of aid. As challenging as this may sound for organisations delivering humanitarian responses, these obstacles should not become excuses for staying absent, or prioritising more stable areas, but should be drivers to try harder to deliver aid where it matters most.



Since its creation, HERE's portfolio consists of two work streams:

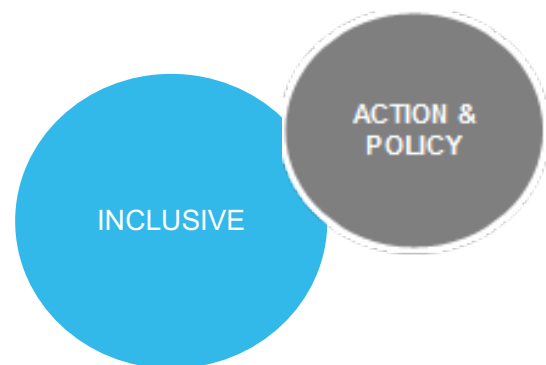
- Self-initiated reviews and studies, covered by funds from public and private donors, and based on HERE's own observations and gap analysis; and
- Commissioned pieces of work, which fit our research agenda and core expertise.

The Year at a Glance

During 2017, HERE continued to explore the main gaps between policy and humanitarian practice. Building on the work carried out in 2016 and the outcomes of the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), most of HERE's work in 2017 has concerned two interlinked areas where the gaps appear particularly wide: the quality of the commitments made until now by donors and humanitarian actors in an effort to enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian action, and the inconsistent advances humanitarian action has made with regard to humanitarian principles, protection, and accountability, despite decades of developments.

Reflecting on the quality of commitments

Building on its analysis of the outcomes of the 2016 WHS and continuing in the spirit of its previous project on "Priorities and Commitments in Humanitarian Action", HERE turned the focus in early 2017 on accountability, beginning with a close look at existing commitments and donor accountability mechanisms. Hailed as one of the main achievements of the Summit, a new 'Grand Bargain' was brokered as an agreement between some 15 major donor governments and most of the world's largest international humanitarian agencies and networks. The agreement followed on already existing commitments as exemplified by the 2003 Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles, meant to guide humanitarian aid and encourage greater donor accountability. Between 2007 to 2011, the Humanitarian Response Index provided an independent review of donor governments' performance against the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) principles. By offering a public measure of humanitarian donor accountability, the HRI became a common reference for debate on donors' humanitarian effectiveness. Early 2017, and thanks to funding from the Joffe Charitable Trust, HERE explored whether it would be feasible for HERE to revive the HRI, and if so, what form this would need to take, and which commitments it would look closer at.



The resulting report, "[Addressing the Humanitarian Donor Accountability Gap? Feasibility Study for an HRI 2.0](#)" highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of the HRI, and reviewed options for a future business model. While HERE found that the HRI had had a clear purpose until its suspension in 2012, it concluded that it would not be a worthwhile exercise to revive it as such in today's environment, given HERE's positioning and capacities. At the same time, the study highlighted that **while many commitments have been made over the years towards better and more effective humanitarian action, the humanitarian community has witnessed less-than-expected results**. Of particular concern to HERE are, for example, the increasing gaps between the needs of war-affected populations and actual humanitarian responses, which are not receiving sufficient attention. Supposedly, the commitments signed at the World Humanitarian Summit and through the Grand Bargain are meant to address most of the gaps in humanitarian responses. However, the quality of those commitments remains to be tested. It is not clear whether there is indeed a link between these specific commitments and effective humanitarian action, or filling the gaps in humanitarian responses, especially those seen in armed conflicts. In light of HERE's own mission and comparative strengths, the report suggested to evaluate

donor performance from an angle that would also take broader systemic challenges to good humanitarian donorship into account. These conclusions have remained pivotal as HERE continued its work in 2017 and going into 2018.

Understanding humanitarian response gaps in armed conflict

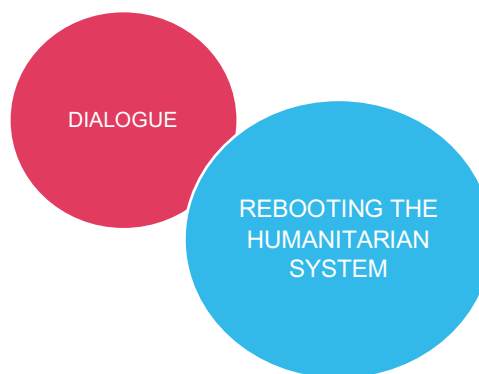
How can humanitarian actors increase their capacity to reach the ones most in need of protection and assistance? In June, HERE took the opportunity to shed some light on this issue by organising the [“Where it matters” panel discussion](#), in partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)



and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). Taking place in Geneva on the eve of the humanitarian segment of ECOSOC, the event was a chance **to look at the ways in which humanitarian organisations and donors should step up their work to deliver humanitarian responses to those most in need during situations of armed conflict.**

Because of risk management considerations, humanitarian actors may tend to concentrate in less volatile area, where they can operate in safer conditions. The event proved to be an opportunity to hear about the issues inhibiting the delivery of principled humanitarian action in armed conflict, from the perspective of humanitarian organisations such as the ICRC, MSF and NRC and donors like the German Government and ECHO. The panellists suggested some tangible steps that can be taken to overcome obstacles to operating in high-risk environments, such as investing in access coordinators, giving more attention and priority to the integration of security into operations, to the continuous engagement with all relevant armed actors and putting the emphasis on the principle of independence. The event concluded on the need for humanitarian organisations to examine how they fare in terms of their institutional willingness and capabilities to accept and manage risks, which are, after all, an inherent part of humanitarian action. Such a reflection goes hand in hand with the humanitarian principles: the principles are the tools that allow humanitarian organisations to be where it matters. For this work, however, to be effective, it is essential to invest in them properly, and to talk about them more openly.

Particularly in high-risk environments, principled humanitarian action sounds very good as a catch-phrase. It is less and less clear, however, what it means. For many organisations, the four core principles are implied in what they do, without further consideration being given to what applying the principles exactly entails. In early 2017, HERE conducted a review of principled humanitarian action of ECHO partners in Iraq. The findings fed into the discussions on June 19. The review asserted that for principled humanitarian action to be labelled as such, there must be demonstrable evidence in terms of how



humanitarian organisations consider and weigh the four principles in their decision-making. Especially in the face of difficult choices, the principles are essential benchmarks in decision-making.

Investigating humanitarian decision-making and priority-setting

As part of HERE's work to shed light on gaps between policy and practice, we also engage in bringing new insight on how the effectiveness of humanitarian response in armed conflict situations can be improved. In line with this mission, HERE has since its inception carried out a project that looks at [the role of "mandates" in humanitarian priority setting for international non-governmental organisations in situations of armed conflict](#).

The aim of the research is to investigate organisational decision-making processes, and how they impact effective aid delivery on the ground. HERE would like to clarify what differences there are between organisations in terms of how they set priorities and come to strategic choices, and what the comparative advantages of the different 'mandates' are. Indeed, humanitarian discourse frequently distinguishes between 'multi-' or 'single-mandate' organisations, depending on whether they define their purposes broadly, or whether they focus exclusively on life-saving assistance in emergency settings. However, we see a lack of evidence and common understanding, both about the practical opportunities and limitations that would arise from different 'mandates'. Is it helpful to talk about mandate-distinctions? What does it mean? In regard to humanitarian organisations' capacity to work in situations of armed conflict, what opportunities and/or limitations arise from different 'mandates'? A closer look at these issues will benefit operational organisations as well as donors, as it will **improve the understanding of different approaches and their implications, and suggest ways to build on such differences for a more effective humanitarian system**.

In order to effectively investigate these questions, HERE can count on the participation of a representative range of organisations that operate in the few countries selected as case studies. The research includes Headquarters (HQ) as well as field visits. In 2017, HERE continued its investigations at HQ level and initiated two desk-based studies on the Central African Republic and Yemen.




Selected commissioned pieces of work

Inherent to HERE's business model is the focus on tailored and commissioned pieces of work. Based on strategic discussions with its Board of Trustees in 2015, HERE decided to focus on pieces of work that would be in line with its mission and core research focus.

In 2017, HERE's work with partners included:

 [Whose Responsibility? Accountability for Refugee Protection and Solutions in a Whole-of-Society Approach](#), commissioned by the Danish Refugee Council

The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and its annex, the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) adopted at the September 2016 UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants, call for a new way of working on refugee response. It is about engaging a wide array of stakeholders through a whole-of-society approach to initiate long-term planning for solutions early on in an emergency, integrate refugees into national development plans, and build on refugee inclusion and self-reliance while benefitting host communities. This report explores the **opportunities and risks for accountability in the specific context of a so-called whole-of-society approach**. The analysis aims to shed light on what it takes for the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) to result in positive changes – better protection and solutions outcomes – for refugees and host communities, and how potential risks associated with this change process can be mitigated. It expresses a commitment to understand the forthcoming changes and to make the best of them for refugees and their host communities.

 [Capacity Strengthening Opportunities and the Role of Country-Based Pooled Funds \(CBPFs\)](#), commissioned by OCHA

Recognising the role currently played by Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs) in enabling access of national and local actors to humanitarian funding and the limits of its coordination mandate, the Funding Coordination Section (FCS) at OCHA commissioned **a mapping exercise of current capacity strengthening opportunities for national and local actors at the global level**. The results of the mapping were meant to provide an overview of existing resources for national and local actors and to help clarify the role CBPFs can play in supporting national and local actors better access CBPFs funding. A May 2017 report complements the separate mapping exercise by outlining and presenting a brief analysis of its main findings. In an effort to ground the findings from the mapping in the country-specific experience of CBPFs, the report also includes a few insights from selected CBPFs.

 [Principled Humanitarian Assistance of ECHO Partners in Iraq](#), Commissioned by the Norwegian Refugee Council

Commissioned by NRC with the support of ECHO, this review takes an in-depth look at **the extent to which humanitarian organisations that receive ECHO funding have incorporated the humanitarian principles in their strategy, decision-making, and practice in Iraq**. In Iraq, humanitarian actors are confronted with a multitude of political and military obstacles that challenge the consistent application of humanitarian principles. This is by no means a new

phenomenon, but a closer look at how humanitarian organisations work to uphold principled humanitarian action seems long overdue. To what degree do humanitarian organisations, in particular those funded by ECHO, use the four core principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence, in order to create the space necessary to operate in war-torn areas in Iraq, to secure and maintain access to people in crisis?



[Real Time Evaluation: Response to Hurricane Matthew in Haiti](#), commissioned by the UK Department for International Development

Knowing that it takes time for humanitarian reform initiatives to be fully translated into practice on the ground, a small group of donor governments, together with a number of agencies that formed a steering group, took the initiative to commission an **independent Real Time Evaluation (RTE) of the international response to hurricane Matthew using the Grand Bargain as an Analytical framework**. Conducted in weeks 6 and 7 of the humanitarian response to hurricane Matthew in Haiti, the RTE presented a unique opportunity to understand if the response, as presented in the Flash Appeal and supported by international humanitarian agencies, was proving to be effective, efficient, relevant, and timely. The RTE also helped to understand if the planning and delivery of the response reflected the commitments listed in the Grand Bargain.

HERE Supporters

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We also thank our partners for their collaboration, in particular Syni and the colleagues at the ICRC's Humanitarium.

Who We Are

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Executive Director: Ed Schenkenberg van Mierop

Programme Manager: Enrique Jimenez

Research Director: Marzia Montemurro

Researcher: Karin Wendt

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Complete financial statements are available upon request.

Contact us

HERE-Geneva
Tourelle Emilio Luisoni, 4th floor
Rue Rothschild 20
1202 Geneva
Tel +41 22 731 13 19

contact@here-geneva.org
www.here-geneva.ch



@HEREGeneva



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