Private sector engagement in humanitarian-development-peace collaboration

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Session summary

The UN emphasizes the need to bridge the gap between humanitarian, development and peace silos and advocates for closer collaboration between the different actors. It calls for shared analysis, collective priority setting, as well as joined up planning and programming with the overall aim of reducing humanitarian need, risk and vulnerability.

As part of the communities in which they operate, businesses have an innate interest to support before, during and after crises, often seamlessly moving across humanitarian, development and peacebuilding responses. This session discussed *how* and *when* do humanitarian, development and peace practitioners come together with private sector entities to leverage their comparative advantages. It made a strong case that private sector actors should be encouraged to actively participate in the different elements of the nexus approach. Through an interactive panel discussion, speakers highlighted concrete examples of how strengthened collaboration and coordination with and among the private sector have benefitted vulnerable people.

Speakers

- Firzan "Hush" Hashim, Country Director, Asia Pacific Alliance for Disaster Management Sri Lanka (A-PAD SL) / CBi Member Network in Sri Lanka
- Jaki Mebur, Market Engagement Manager, Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation programme, GSMA
- Sudipto Mukerjee, Resident Representative, UNDP Bangladesh
- David "Dave" Young, Managing Director & Senior Partner, BCG (moderator)

Summary of the discussion
(per speaker in alphabetical order by last name)

Firzan "Hush" Hashim, Country Director, Asia Pacific Alliance for Disaster Management Sri Lanka (A-PAD SL) / CBi Member Network in Sri Lanka

APAD SL – like CBi Member Networks in other countries – provides a *platform for the private sector to come together around disaster management and coordinate with the Government, as well as humanitarian, development and peace actors*. APAD SL represents the private sector for example in the UN Humanitarian Country Team and the National Disaster Management Coordinating Committee. In reflecting about the 'triple nexus', Firzan called for clearer leadership, a mechanism for engagement and a concrete roadmap for partners – including the private sector – to act on.

Firzan provided an example from the Sri Lankan Civil War on how the *private sector can complement the efforts of traditional actors*. When people were moving from the non-state controlled areas to the government controlled areas, they were normally provided with ration items such as flour and oil. However, without the necessary equipment, they were unable to turn the ingredients into something edible. Hence bakeries came forward and offered to bake bread using those items, donors offered to cover the costs and the government and civil-military coordination helped in ensuring the food items were delivered. According to Firzan, the private sector also played an important role in the reconciliation process, bringing people from different areas together to interact, exchange and learn from each other. The private sector also provided employment and livelihoods support – important components in rehabilitation. As the moderator pointed out, these examples highlighted how governments, humanitarian, development and peace practitioners can benefit from the interest and capacities of the private sector, but also leverage the *opportunity for inclusion within businesses*.

In talking about prevention and addressing the root causes of instability, Firzan reminded the audience that *the private sector has an innate interest to support peace as instability is not good for business either*. A proper *understanding of the context is critical and providing hazard maps for the private sector that also reflect possible hot spots for conflict and instability might help them pay heightened attention to conflict sensitivity and increase their positive contributions to peace*. Following the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks, societal tensions were high and the risk of unrest increased together with discrimination towards parts of the population. To support the Government efforts to address misinformation, private sector entities established non-discrimination policies and guidelines, and engaged in advocacy to highlight how the diversity of Sri Lanka should be seen as a positive factor. In fact, the private sector can easily reach hundreds, even thousands of people through their employees, customers, suppliers and other stakeholders. Building on Firzan's remarks, the moderator pointed out that *peace actors should therefore also leverage the reach of the private sector, provide them with the necessary know-how and help them build social cohesion within the ecosystem in which they operate*.

Jaki Mebur, Market Engagement Manager, Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation programme for Africa, GSMA

In the past the role of mobile network operators was restricted to service providers where governments, humanitarian and development organizations would tap into them for cash, mass SMS campaigns and other activities. However, GSMA is advocating for *mobile operators to be invited by humanitarian and development partners to engage at an earlier stage - in ideation, co-creation and planning*. This is now happening for example in Somalia where the cash working group has made a deliberate effort to include mobile and digital service providers in (some of) their coordination meetings. By doing so, the private sector partners also gain important insights on the context, understand the underlying factors that may lead to or exacerbate a crisis, and potentially provide information or technologies to address them. As Jaki pointed out, *a better understanding leads to better services*. On the contrary, if the private sector is not included, the risk is either for them to develop fancy solutions that do not address a specific problem or for humanitarian and development organizations to request technologies that may not be available. Jaki also reminded that the *starting point for any*

collaboration should be to find common ground by focusing on the accountability to affected populations and ensuring compliance with conflict sensitivity and the Do No Harm principle.

Jaki emphasized that *technology can a double-edged sword that can be used to fuel conflict but can also be a tool to fight misinformation and coordinate activities*. To address this, GSMA through its Humanitarian Connectivity Charter has created a 'community of learning' to build the capacity of mobile operators in preparing for and responding to crises. The objective is to ensure mobile operators understand the technical aspects of and their specific role in the disaster management cycle. After the Beirut Port explosions, GSMA collaborated with UNDP and coordinated with mobile operators to conduct rapid socio-economic impact assessments. In Japan, a mobile operator, KDDI, has used big data for COVID-19 contact tracing and analyzing the movement of people to help inform policy decisions.

Sudipto Mukerjee, Resident Representative, UNDP Bangladesh

Recognizing the private sector as one of the largest development actors, Sudipto explained that UNDP Bangladesh is constantly speaking to and with Chambers of Commerce and Industry, companies and other private sector stakeholders. He called for *mutual respect among stakeholders that builds on the unique strengths and comparative advantages of each*. UNDP Bangladesh has also invested heavily in data collection and analytics, recognizing that *a common understanding of the context should be the basis for everyone's programming*. He also highlighted two concrete examples of how UNDP in Bangladesh has recently mobilized and collaborated with the private sector – from planning to implementation.

- As the Rohingya refugees had fled to Cox's Bazar, UNDP reached out to private sector partners with physical presence in the area to see if they were interested in being part of the humanitarian response. A large number of start-ups saw this as a good business opportunity to align their objectives with those of humanitarian and development organizations, but also increase their visibility and build their own branding.
- In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNDP convened some of the largest companies together to discuss how they had been affected and how together they could look for solutions. UNDP also connected the private sector with the government to form a trilateral platform to maximize resources, including private sector contributions to the COVID-19 response (manufacturing equipment, procuring supplies, providing logistical support, helping in the vaccine roll out etc.).

Using these examples, Sudipto emphasized the *need to invest more in localizing the response itself*. He also noted that *even companies that are not eager to engage in the humanitarian response itself, can play a role by investing in local supply chains. Supporting local companies in supply and value chains can also have an important stabilizing impact on the societies* (through employment and livelihoods) – thus contributing to peace.

Building on the questions and comments from the audience, Sudipto later went on to emphasize the *need for increased attention and action on prevention*. This also implies that at a minimum, *all private sector engagement should rest on conflict sensitivity and the concept of Do No Harm*. Acknowledging the increasing number of businesses that are better aware and willing to take action to address larger societal concerns, Sudipto called for more

awareness raising and capacity building to help companies understand these concepts and their implication to their operations. While larger companies are typically in a better position to cope with and recover from crises, UNDP Bangladesh has particularly focused on supporting smaller entrepreneurs and connecting them to e-commerce platforms. This has enabled the MSMEs to have some income, helping them cope with crises. Building on Sudipto's points, the moderator suggested that *economic inclusion that does not burden local systems can be a powerful way to address peace*. For example, connecting refugees and vulnerable, underprivileged host communities in the same (global) supply chains might build social cohesion as people would be dependent on each other for their prosperity.

Key take-away points from the session

- A common understanding of the context should be the basis for all humanitarian, development and peace programming – regardless of the stakeholder(s) implementing it. The 'triple nexus' also calls for mutual respect among stakeholders that builds on the unique strengths and comparative advantages of each, including those of the private sector.

- Governments, as well as humanitarian, development and peace practitioners should take advantage of the interest and capacities of the private sector to support broader societal efforts. Without narrowing the scope of engagement to just financial contributions, they should leverage the expertise and reach of private sector entities. They should also recognize the opportunity for inclusion within businesses (to employees, customers, suppliers and other partners).

- There is a need to invest more in localizing emergency response efforts and private sector networks can be important partners in doing so. Local businesses are part of the fabric of societies already before crises.

- Even companies that are not eager to engage in the humanitarian response itself, can play a role by investing in local supply chains. Supporting local companies in supply and value chains can also have an important stabilizing effect on the societies (through employment and livelihoods). Furthermore, economic inclusion that does not burden local systems can be a powerful way to address peace.

- Private sector actors, including mobile network operators, need to be engaged at the earlier stages of analysis, priority setting and planning and not just tapped in to support implementation. By doing so, the private sector partners gain important insights on the context and can offer solutions that address real-life challenges. A better understanding of the context leads to better services.

- Hazard maps that reflect the possible hot spots for disasters and conflict could help the private sector make more informed decisions about their engagement, including positive contributions to peace and stability.

- Conflict sensitivity and the Do No Harm approach should be the basis for all private sector engagement – regardless of the context. To ensure these concepts are

internalized and embedded in private sector operations, they could be incorporated into company orientations for new employees, workforce development programs, supplier trainings and other capacity building opportunities.

- Increased attention and action on prevention are needed. While more and more companies are aware of their societal and environmental impacts, humanitarian, development and peace practitioners can help increase their contextual understanding and equip them with the necessary tools to address the root causes or drivers of conflicts and disasters.

- Lastly, there is a need to better capture and broadcast the practical examples and lessons learned – such as those discussed during the session – that can help us collectively move from a siloed approach towards true collaboration.