



Summary Report 2017 Annual Partnership Consultation



Introduction

The 2017 Annual Partnership Consultation was an introductory opportunity for WFP Executive Director David Beasley to host NGO partners in Rome. In a change to previous formats, only partner CEOs or their deputies were in attendance, to ensure high-level policy conversations and a real opportunity for senior NGO leaders to understand the Executive Director's priorities and strategic direction for WFP.

In his opening remarks, the Executive Director started with a challenge – did partners think the APC was a worthwhile undertaking? The next 24 hours would provide an answer.

Underlining how we need to change the way we think if we are to reach Zero Hunger by 2030, he argued that no one can be neutral in the face of atrocities, evil and corruption, and common sense language and plain speaking are necessary to ensure we reach people most in need.

Session 1: The SG's Reform Agenda and the New Way of Working

In a keynote address by video link from UN HQ in New York, UN Assistant Secretary General for Strategic Coordination Fabrizio Hochschild outlined the key elements of the Secretary General's reform agenda and its potential impact on partnerships. He highlighted the importance of a focus on the field, and three main areas of impact for the reform –

1. The SDGs emphasise partnerships as essential to achieving Agenda 2030
2. Strengthened Resident Coordinators with real authority, but without limiting autonomy of humanitarian agencies, and while retaining impartiality
3. Fit-for-purpose UN country teams with a more modular and agile approach

Responding, World Vision CEO Kevin Jenkins stressed the need for change, but that change was always personal and that success was inextricably linked to execution. It may mean, for example, that some organisations need to step back from activities where they are not best in class. He also challenged states to let the reform process proceed in their own countries.

The WFP Perspective: WFP Deputy Executive Director Amir Abdulla asked how partners would really be included in a reformed system, especially in the development side of the nexus where action is based largely on national plans and priorities. For WFP, NGOs would remain indispensable partners in emergencies, and particularly under our new business model which insists on collaboration and partnership for achieving genuine impact.

In closing, Fabrizio Hochschild acknowledged the importance of a mindset change to transform partnerships and a need for the UN to become better partners while "putting our own house in order".

Session II: Famine and Early Action: Politics, Practice and What Needs to Change

After a year in which four countries faced potential famines, this session took a step back and looked at some of the lessons learned from a complex and sometimes frustrating period, which left all partners reflecting on how the humanitarian system can best deliver an efficient and effective response.

Save the Children USA CEO Carolyn Miles opened the discussion by outlining three key challenges in delivering hope in the four famine context –

1. Conflict – and the limitations it places on access and delivery.
2. Complexity – it's never just about food, but so much more.
3. Commitment – the early warning signs were there, but we need earlier and sustained commitment.

The vital role of local and national actors was presented by Elijah Manyok Jok, founder and Executive Director of South Sudanese NGO Smile Again Africa Development Organisation, who gave an honest account of where organisations such as his had genuine comparative advantages over large international groups, but also where they still require investment in capacity, both programmatic and institutional. He encouraged APC participants by pointing out that he himself was evidence that their work has real impact, as he started life as a refugee in Kenya but had been given many opportunities through the intervention of the UN and NGOs.

MSF Director of Emergencies Jean-Clement Cabrol warned against the close focus on famine countries when other places were also in great need, particularly those with large numbers of displaced people.



He admitted that MSF was prepared to compromise a principled approach in order to reach people in need, citing the use of escorts in contexts such as northeast Nigeria – what was important was the task of saving lives, to separate out priorities and take risks.

The WFP Perspective: WFP Director of Emergencies Denise Brown asked five hard questions –

1. Is the UN losing our clout to speak to the moral and ethical issues behind crises, and has the humanitarian structure become too heavy?
2. Is UN member state involvement in conflict driving the complexity of the crises to which we are responding?
3. Has the UN humanitarian system become increasingly risk averse due to our relationship with member states who want us to deliver on their terms?
4. How can WFP message better to donors the need for funding at the right time, to avoid being chastised for not doing enough, fast enough?
5. In new emergency operations, the UN tends to be slower and more risk averse – are we overstretched, or are we unable to adapt to a changed global context?

In conclusion, change in donor behaviour is a critical enabler to collective and effective response, and to making the investments we need to change the system to ensure speed and scale. Together, we need to engage differently so that the terms of the Grand Bargain are met by all.





Session III: The triple nexus of humanitarian action, development and peace – what is the challenge for humanitarian principles, operations and partnerships?

Agenda 2030, the UN reform proposals, the Grand Bargain and the New Way of Working all emphasize the humanitarian-development nexus with a focus on prevention and collective outcomes at the country level. Aligning humanitarian action more strongly with peace and security may offer an opportunity for better humanitarian programming, in particular in situations of protracted conflicts, but subsuming humanitarian assistance under a development agenda set by States also risks jeopardizing the independence of humanitarian action.

In a wide-ranging keynote speech, ICRC Director of Policy Hugo Slim first clarified what was meant by the 'triple nexus', noting how the policy shifts agencies from the dualistic tension of opposing humanitarian-development "poles" to a more accommodating "triangle" in which most organizations and most operations can find a space.

After outlining what the triple nexus meant in practice to the ICRC, Hugo Slim went on to offer a critique, in particular the large protection gap in current nexus thinking which is currently biased towards assistance, development and peace. He emphasised the "clear red line" around the need to keep principled humanitarian action alive within the nexus – that impartial organizations must be able to work with all parties to conflict, and should not be expected to be biased towards the State as the main development actor.

In response, Action Contre la Faim (France) CEO Veronique Andrieux argued that NGOs have been engaged in the double nexus for decades, and that in the SDG era it was a question not of a longer list of commitments to humanitarian principles, but of sticking to current principles. It is also important to identify what kind of peace humanitarians seek – is it peace and security itself, or a peace grounded in human rights?

The WFP Perspective: WFP Sudan Country Director Matthew Hollingworth offered his experience in Khartoum as an example of a New Way of Working pilot, although in practice the peace element was being entirely left out of the triple nexus as the UN draws down its mission.

States are not walking the talk in Sudan, giving the impression that peace can be handled at a later stage, not least because peace has political connotations. But without peace we are doomed to fail. The UN is part of a peace community – although we may feel uncomfortable at times, peace is one of our roles.

The nexus and humanitarian principles can coexist, even if we must be pragmatic in their application. A joint accountability framework is needed that can deliver collective outcomes while addressing hunger – we must involve governments and all partners, otherwise we cannot be held accountable.

There followed an extremely lively discussion of the triple nexus impact on the way we work, Samaritan's Purse highlighting a concern of many that adding peace to what we are doing already threatened to "break the axle of the nice red humanitarian wagon".





Session IV: Digital Revolution – what impact on humanitarian action?

WFP Director of Innovation and Change Management Robert Opp opened the session by underlining that now is the time for WFP and partners to embrace digitalisation in areas where it can introduce efficiencies and cost effectiveness.

A panel of programmatic, policy and technology specialists made the following key observations on the opportunities of digitalisation:

- Today's humanitarianism is about networks that are digitally empowered, that bypass intermediaries and break up monopolies, and empower local organisations.
- Do we need to look at beneficiaries more as 'customers', and produce end-to-end solutions that better serve their needs?
- WFP's SCOPE beneficiary registration system is the backbone of the Somalia response and allows tracking and verification of food and cash transfers.
- Beneficiaries need their rights affirmed, including the right to protection of their personal data. We need to put the human back in humanitarian.

Closing Remarks

The Executive Director closed the APC by reminding partners that WFP welcomed positive criticism, and wanted to remain open and transparent. NGO partners remain crucial, and WFP wants deeper and better relationships. So yes, the meeting had definitely been worthwhile – a learning experience, and a sharing experience over two days which he hoped would have genuine impact on the other 363 days of the year.

Thank You – To APC moderator, WFP Regional Director for East and Central Africa Valerie Guarnieri, who held the sessions together seamlessly, and moved discussions along with humour and a close understanding of the issues being debated.

For follow-up on any of the above WFP perspectives, sharing of additional ideas and any other APC-related issues, please contact wfp.ngounit@wfp.org

NGO Unit
Partnership, Advocacy and Coordination Division
World Food Programme
Via Cesare Giulio Viola 68,
00148 Rome, Italy

And on the risks –

- New networks currently may not be able to respond at scale required.
- How do we deal with inclusion and exclusion errors in beneficiary registration; as well as capacity gaps?
- How do we ensure we don't create a digital divide and leave people behind?
- Many financial service providers have access to our data – how ready are we to deal with cyberattacks?

The WFP Perspective: The aid model is changing and we all must change with it. WFP's evolution is not a threat but an opportunity for partnership – WFP does not seek sector dominance, but to be a service provider.

WFP wants to be an enabler for partners in the digital space, providing platforms that NGOs can join. In pursuing digitalisation, we need to balance technology with risk, while keeping the people we serve at the centre.



Photo credits:
WFP/Rein Skullerud
WFP/Giulio d'Adamo