PROMOTING A COMMUNITY OF INTEREST IN THE CONTEXT OF CIVAD: A PROPOSAL

Summary overview

The complexities and uncertainties that increasingly face the international community far transcend the capacity of any one sector, government or institution – no matter how prominent or powerful – to deal with their consequences effectively. To that extent the international community faces a *capacities challenge* – a clear recognition that more and more the future will be best addressed through *communities of interests*. These communities of interests will require a wide range of actors – governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental – to collaborate with each other far more consistently and substantively than has been the case in the past. It will require in the first instance, a clear understanding of "the language," motives, value-addeds and comparative advantages of those who would and should be part of such communities. With this capacities challenge in mind, the note that follows outlines an approach for dealing with some of the major constraints that inhibit effective collaboration.

The approach does not purport to be the answer to developing communities of interests, but rather the beginning of an approach towards that end. Using a two axes scenario methodology – the *Humanitarian Capacities Challenge* (HCC) -- in the year 2030 designed to show how greater appreciation of the ways that potential capacities of different types of organisations can address a common problem, and that this awareness opens the way for more effective collaboration and community-building.

Background

The CIVAD Action Plan emphasises that "over the years NATO has learned that military means, although essential, are not enough on their own to meet the many complex challenges faced in the management of crises. Indeed, it recognises that it must work in concert with other actors to contribute to a comprehensive approach that effectively combines political, civilian and military crisis management instruments."

Nowhere is this statement more relevant than when it comes to addressing the complex humanitarian crises that will have to be faced in the foreseeable future. And yet, there are various constraints that all too often hamper the ability of different types of organisations to collaborate effectively. When it comes to interaction between the military and organisations within the humanitarian sector, a range of misperceptions and misunderstandings frequently hampers collaboration. These include what might be described as "language differences," an inability to convey the essence of military and humanitarian missions and a lack of appreciation

about the comparative advantages and value-addeds that each can bring to the humanitarian table.

These continued communications challenges have led to a variety of efforts to address them, but they nevertheless persist. In no small part, this is so because such efforts tend to focus on ways to define and delineate roles in operational situations. Few start at a far more basic level of understanding the issues of language, motives and comparative advantages and value-addeds. Without an appreciation of these three elements, the essential underpinnings of a community of interest are bypassed, and instead "community" reflects negotiated approaches and "legalistic" limitations to collaboration. A deeper understanding of what each side has to offer and how this is communicated should serve as the basis of a more enduring and flexible approach to community and collaboration.

The capacity challenge and a community of interest

The types, dimensions and dynamics of humanitarian crises will increase significantly in the foreseeable future, in some instances, exponentially. So, too, will the opportunities to prevent or at least mitigate their potential impacts. Yet, in so saying, it is also clear that the humanitarian sector, as conventionally defined, will not have the necessary capacities to deal with the intensifying nature of future humanitarian crises. A much wider consortium of actors will be required to meet these challenges, and such a consortium might include the military and private sector as well those in the humanitarian sector in a triangular relationship of recognised interests. Before doing so potential collaborators will have to regard themselves as a community of interest.

In this sense, a community of interest can best be fostered through a process that will result in better understanding of the potential benefits and roles that each can offer. Towards that end, what is required is a situation that demonstrates both. The Humanitarian Futures Programme at King's College, London, offers a scenario-based exercise that brings, through a three-phased fictional case study, the opportunity for participants to understand

- ◼ "the language" – the terminology and concepts – of different actors in anticipating, preparing for and responding to potential threats;
- ◼ the ways that complex situations and potential threats are defined by the organisational behaviour patterns of respective participants;
- ◼ the benefits – the value-addeds and comparative advantages – that respective participants have to offer for dealing with potential threats.

This exercise, outlined below, is intended to serve as an organisational "tool," available to all who are trying to identify common interests to achieve common objectives.

The scenario approach and objectives

Scenarios were originally used to enable policy planners to think more creatively about social forecasting and public policy. It did so by describing the future using stories as if written by people in the future. Increasingly scenarios were and continue to be used to guide strategy and test decision-making skills in complex environments. However, in this instance the scenario

approach intended to promote a community of interest has a different objective. Using a highly complex futures-oriented scenario, the *Humanitarian Capacities Challenge* (HCC) scenario is intended to promote understanding about the advantages of cross sector interaction and the way dialogue can be used as a basis for longer term interaction.

The HCC scenario is intended to last for 1½ days, and has three phases, namely, *precursor*, *prompter* and *perfect storm*. In the first, *precursor*, a futures world is explored in a stable state. Potential threats are not evident, but nevertheless identifiable symptoms or undercurrents of potential "discontinuities" can be detected. The *prompter* phase sees growing evidence of a range of possible hazards that might lead to one or more major humanitarian crises. The final phase, *perfect storm*, introduces a complex catastrophe, which offers few obvious measures for addressing it through standard procedures and repertoires.

To explore how this phased scenario will be handled, three sets of actors will be asked to lend their respective expertise: humanitarian organizations, the private sector and the military. These actors will form four clusters, and each cluster will work in one of four quadrants. In Quadrant #1, a standard set of humanitarian organizations, including UN agencies and International Non-Governmental Organisations, will be the principal participants. Quadrant #2 will be an admix of humanitarian and military, while Quadrant #3 will combine private sector representatives with humanitarians. Quadrant #4 will bring together all three sets of participants.

The debriefing stage will enable participants to have a better understanding about the language used by each set of participants, the ways that they see their respective roles, responsibilities and interests and the value-addeds and comparative advantages they each bring to the three phased scenario. From this shared experience, participants as well as facilitators and observers should be able to direct participants to where there are common interests and opportunities for more systematic and consistent collaboration.

A community of interest: an approach and a tool

The HCC should in the first instance serve as a creative first step in exploring ways to test an approach for promoting communities of interest. If successful, this approach should provide a tool to foster such communities well into the future.