Humanitarian Dialogue: 
The VisionLab
The Humanitarian Dialogue’s Vision Lab was an ambitious endeavour to finding novel approaches to addressing some of the most pressing long-term, strategic questions facing the work of the humanitarian community.
Humanitarian Dialogue - The Vision Lab

Originally conceived as a single four-half-day workshop spread over three days of the 32nd International Conference of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, it transformed in loco into a dynamic relay-style workshop, with a hard core of about 15 participants maintaining the narrative coherence of a remarkably profound dialogue, plus an additional 35 participants providing insights, challenges, and novel perspectives on individual topics that emerged throughout the three days. The plurality of these participants came from the Movement itself (National Societies, ICRC, IFRC) with a large group from government, NGOs, the UN, and academia and private industry.
The workshop began with a quick reflection on the recent work of the humanitarian community. Participants identified those areas that aroused the greatest pride and the greatest concern. Responsiveness emerged as the single attribute that the group was most proud of, followed by the handling of the Ebola crisis. The areas of concern were more widely spread, including the care the community shows to its volunteers, the response to the conflict, the migration crisis and, in particular, the Syrian civil war, as well as issues around collaboration among humanitarian players, funding, advocacy, and others.
Ashanta Osborne-Moses of the Guyana Red Cross formally opened the Vision Lab explaining the intent of the workshop to ask the questions that we sometimes don’t have the opportunity or the courage to ask. And beyond asking these questions, the workshop aims to answer some of them as clearly and as boldly as possible. Then the facilitator, Dan Newman of The Value Web, laid out a plan for the next three days’ work, a plan that was re-designed several times to reflect the shifting participant group and the unexpected nature of some of the themes that subsequently emerged.

A group of 18 participants then developed their individual visions of what a more effective humanitarian community might look like by 2019, at the time of the 33rd International Conference. While there was significant divergence of opinion, a few common themes emerged: A surprising number of visions raised the dilemma of how the Red Cross and Red Crescent and the broader community ‘lives’ humanitarian values through its strategy, its way of working, and its behaviours and the need to inculcate these values universally, starting with children. There was also a widely-held frustration with the political and diplomatic constraints that fetter humanitarian work.
Humanitarian Dialogue - The Vision Lab

Individual Visions

Andreea

2013 - CHANGE?

* WILL NEED TO BE POLITICAL

- SDG
- CARE
- SENBAI

- HR
- INL
- DIGNITY FOR SURVIVORS

WHAT CAN HUMANITARIANS DO?

- BECOME BETTER @ FOCUSING ON DONATING PEOPLE
- WHEREVER POSSIBLE, LOCAL FIRST
- COLLABORATION, COORDINATION & RESPECT
- ACCOUNTABILITY - QUALITY, TRANSPARENCY, ADVOCACY
- LEAD UP TO PRINCIPALS

STRONGER NS DELIVERING SERVICES TO MOST VULNERABLE IN A MORE EFFECTIVE MANNER.

BORDER REASONS - BORDER TRANSPORTATION.

IN "BOX" "OUT"
Humanitarian Dialogue - The Vision Lab

Individual Visions

Volunteerism - Comm. Strengthening - Policies

- Good Governance - Partnerships - Common Monitoring - Mechanisms

- adequate funding
- strong, equipped Local actors
- systems
- universal Access

Climate Change:
- awareness, legal framework
- DRR
- behavioural patterns of government/institutions

Migration:
- awareness, response prevention
- root causes addressed, ending conflict, behavioral change
-

Armed conflict:
- better protection of vulnerable groups
- human security
- terrorism & threats, corruption at all levels of society

Better efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian work:
- improved resilience of communities/local governments/better preparedness to recurring disasters, to major catastrophes
- Better financial provision through multi-year financing, priority in funding, better coordination within the agencies, between UN and others
- Better link between government, UN, Red Cross, CSO, NGOs
- Humanitarian and Development link
- Humanitarian community shared agenda: issues that go beyond its mandate; addressing the root causes, but it needs new agenda, new tools
Humanitarian Dialogue - The Vision Lab

Individual Visions

- Displacement
  - Impact
  - Extensive learning
- Community
  - Impact
  - Children's
  - Mental health
- Migration
  - Impact
  - Internal displacement
  - Humanitarian

We have achieved success by being vision-focused on four key FEW things. The focus is the selection of structural and from the problem right at the source of the (a) level change to (d) local. (b) the top (c) conflict (d) impacted

We put an adaptive approach
- Translation = the absolute foundation for a robust vision and work

Involving common people as volunteers. Every volunteer is valuable.

- Displacement
  - Humanitarian
    - Vision of non-value
    - More strongly a demand

5. Working for humanistic education
    - Peace point for humanistic education
    - Giving people a voice to speaking at large

   - How does it develop
   - And the topic on Agenda will still be
   - Unfortunately

In general - Daryn know is there a real willingness?
Individual Visions

1. During the past four years we have been most successful in bringing about a structural impact and change in disaster management architecture from response to DRR. Yes there now a very big difference in changing the mindset of the relevant actors, and we need to invest more on DRR to withstand the shock of disasters.

2. There has been less impact in areas like mitigation, climate change and community health.

3. We have been able to achieve effective coordination and making better use of scarce resources and making better use of scarcer resources by strengthening cooperation and collaboration and making relevant stakeholders and avoiding duplication of efforts. We can make further improvement by sharing our experiences and good practices.

M. HOG
Humanitarian Dialogue - The Vision Lab

Individual Visions
Humanitarian Dialogue - The Vision Lab

Individual Visions

MATT

Q1: Scale? Evidence? Programmed or accidental? Which do we “know” about? Is this new or 2019?

Q2: Armed conflict? Reliable power of “sector”

Q3 & 4: An embrace of + genuine commitment to co-production

Cosmopolitan to mutual transformation - beyond change makers + changed
- local + transnational dialogues + resource + resource ideas + volunteering together

36: RC + RC = battling competitors or...

WAR/conflict
Migration
Urbanization/Migration

Sitting at table

Disaster Risk Reduction
Training education
Healthy Lifestyle Promotion

MATT
Humanitarian Dialogue - The Vision Lab

Individual Visions

LEENA

RCRC 2019

We are stronger:
- DRR
- Community based approach
- We are still
  Strong in disaster response,
  but we work also on prevention
  & recovery.

Important: working in local communities,
  working with vulnerable people
After a brief plenary conversation, during which the participants and facilitators devised a new workshop design – more a relay than a marathon – four teams looked at four different dimensions of change for the humanitarian community:

**Scope**
To what extent does change need to happen at the level of mission and vision, to what extent at the level of strategy (prioritizing use of scarce resources), to what extent at the tactical level (the day-to-day mechanics of humanitarian work)?

**Scale**
Where should we be questioning the global aspects of the humanitarian mission? Where does the mission and the way of working need to be refined to have greater impact on individuals? How are these needs integrated with national and community priorities?

**Role**
How should the humanitarian community interact differently over the next four years with professionals, with governments, with volunteers, with affected populations, and with other stakeholders?

**Ambition**
What aspects of our collective humanitarian work needs to be completely re-thought (revolution)? Where are innovation or improvement more appropriate? Where do we simply face broken processes and tools that merely require repair?

These four teams met again the second morning and on-boarded new participants in their work. Each of the four teams developed a map of how we might think about the humanitarian community along their assigned dimension and briefly shared their findings with the rest of participants, in order to avoid the confusion with the IC plenary.
Then, based on the work of the previous day as well as inputs from the Thematic Sessions, being run in parallel, the whole group developed a list of key questions whose answers might help shape the humanitarian community’s work over the coming four years. A long list of questions emerged from that discussion:

- Why do we need Resolutions?
- How can we look after volunteers?
- Do we live our Fundamental Principles?
- Are we compromising our values?
- How can we teach courage and humanitarian values to children?
- What is our movement’s distinctive power and how do we leverage it?
- How do we avoid/mitigate the next Ebola-like crisis?
- How do we bring communities to the table?
- How do we build effective coordination into the humanitarian community?

To which the group added several additional questions, including:

- What actions should the RCRC movement take to better benefit from the increase in global humanitarian and resources?
- How do we bring communities and individuals to the table?
- Governance / Accountability?
- How do we prepare, as opposed to react/mitigate?
- How do we deal with Black Swan risks?
New teams were formed mixing the four previous teams so that the work on all four dimensions was represented in each new team. These five new teams were tasked with choosing one of these questions and developing into a rich interview guide.

**Humanitarian Dialogue - The Vision Lab**

**WHAT ACTIONS SHOULD THE RLCRC MOVEMENT TAKE TO BETTER BENEFIT FROM THE INCREASE IN GLOBAL HUMANITARIAN AID RESOURCES?**

**Money**

**What is our movement's distinctive power and how do we leverage it?**

**Power**

**How do we bring the COMMUNITY to the TABLE?**

**Communities**

1. What is the purpose of a resolution?
2. How do we know if it has achieved its desired impact?
3. For a more effective resolution, who should be involved in putting it?
4. For a more efficient process, who should be involved?
5. Is there a need to develop new rules (are the present ones the right ones?)
6. How do resolutions address local communities and their needs?
7. Do local communities comply by the resolutions? Why ad why not?

**Prevention**

1. Support DOC/Coalition
2. Use MT Action Plan to improve prevention through proximity
3. Capacitate every actor in conflict situations

**Resolutions**
The five themes that were chosen were:
- Communities
- Power
- Money
- Prevention
- Resolutions

and most of the rest of the workshop was devoted to developing these themes; initially refining smart questions and then launching the work of finding insightful answers.

As participants spread out in the Conference Centre to participate in other sessions and to socialize, several of them used this interview guide to solicit input from a broader public. One of the teams – Communities – invited about a dozen participants who had not been part of the Vision Lab to an ad hoc workshop facilitated by one of the teams.
Of the numerous themes discussed in this workshop-within-a-workshop, perhaps the most important was the focus on the listening vocation of the humanitarian community; i.e., the idea that the dignity of affected populations (refugees, victims of natural disasters, etc.) depends not solely on providing supplies for basic survival and comfort, but on listening to individuals and communities and developing a shared idea of their needs and how to serve them. As such, the humanitarian community should be held accountable directly to the communities served. When all five teams returned to the Vision Lab to share their findings and develop some insightful answers to the smart questions they developed earlier in the day, several important themes emerged. Simply put, the top-down nature of the Power, Money, and Resolution teams met the bottom-up ambitions of the Community and Prevention teams to produce a small number of powerful messages.
The **Power** team looked for the means to have greater influence on decision-makers at the political level and decided that access to that power could be found through the communities, through volunteers, and through the humanitarian actors themselves, such as the Red Cross and Red Crescent, thus turning the power equation upside-down.

The **Money** team also sought a bottom-up logic to what is commonly viewed as the top-down challenge of funding humanitarian work. Their principal insight was to propose re-directing fund-raising from a geographic or institutional basis to a more thematic basis, thereby matching the programmatic work of many donors. This thematic approach would provide the foundation for constructive feedback loops between donors, communities, and humanitarian actors. This team also discussed the challenge of managing earmarked funds.

The **Resolutions** team expressed a certain amount of frustration with the existing approach to decision-making (or decision-postponing) in a bubble rather than being integrated into broader community discussions. They suggested, for example, that the approach adopted by the Vision Lab itself, as well as the local Hub events that preceded it, might serve as a model for a more inclusive approach to the governance of the humanitarian community, and the Red Cross and Red Crescent in particular.

The **Prevention** team focused their discussion on making better use of the Movement action plan and investing more effectively in the capacity of National Societies to prevent (and of course, respond to) humanitarian crises.

Finally, as mentioned above, the **Communities** team focused on listening and accountability; i.e., on how the humanitarian community as a whole can effectively play the role of convener and connector with a bottom-up spirit of humanitarian diplomacy.

The workshop then shifted gears and, after a quick de-brief of the five team’s discussions, the group had a lengthy discussion of how to summarise shared outcomes and, in particular, how to communicate this summary at the closing plenary of the 32nd International Conference by way of an 8-minute presentation by Ashanta Osborne-Moses.

This proved surprisingly easy since the powerful theme of Accountability clearly linked all five team’s discussions. This illustration captures the key themes of the discussion and the text of the closing plenary speech follows this report.
To close the workshop, four teams quickly laid out, in the form of film storyboards, four-year scenarios for how the work of the Vision Lab might influence the humanitarian community and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement over the next four years leading to the 33rd International Conference.

One of the teams produced a remarkably pessimistic vision, coloured by the increasingly frequent and destructive consequences of climate change. The other three teams laid out more hopeful scenarios, one concerning a more open approach to Resolutions, a second imagining a more collaborative model for leading the humanitarian movement, and a third conceiving of the changes that had been discussed during the three days of the Vision Lab as forming a rolling set of change instigators, shifting in form opportunistically and maturing in effectiveness over the course of the next four years.
Humanitarian Dialogue - The Vision Lab

- Follow up to COP 21!!!
- All actors of conflict included in Humanitarian Action

HUMANITY

2016

2017

2018

2019

A.C.Hood got less!

All actors in Conflict included in Humanitarian Action
What follows is Ashanta Osborne-Moses’s summary presentation as part of the Conference’s closing plenary.

In order to hold each other accountable we need to take risks, we need to face the fear, we need to be bold and open to each other. So today I am here to take a risk in openly and honestly sharing with you the voices of approximately 200 people who spend the last three days exploring a new collaborative way of thinking. We have given our time, opinion, feedback and aspiration to collectively try to connect the discussions happening in the Conference to the ground.

In that space we dared to dream, explore, challenge, disagree as people on what are the main changes that are needed in order to be more impactful as humanitarian actors.

From my personal point of view I can assure you that these discussion made us uncomfortable in many instances and at times caused us to question: the influence of our values on the way we work and interact in the humanitarian space.

What was positive however, was that in this laboratory of voices, from a princess to a volunteer to a Secretary General, to UN representatives and to Governments, we were able to identify some key elements that have to inspire our actions. Our accountability to communities should be guided by the extend we respond to their needs and the honesty with which this is done. Dignity comes from the conversation and the dialogue with communities.

As humanitarian actors, what are the filters we use when listening to communities? Are we listening to learn or do we listen to validate what we already decided? How do we learn to listen better? Do we ask the right questions? How do we do this systematically? Are you ready to accept that the next humanitarian kit won’t be a hygiene kit but will be a smartphone.

We have choices, either we evolve as humanitarian communities and truly listen to the need of people or we become irrelevant.

Communities’ voices give us the power and the legitimacy to transform the humanitarian agenda.

Let’s talk about power. What is our distinctive power? Do we have the power we need as humanitarian actors to influence the bigger decision makers? We need to be empowered to drive the humanitarian agenda.

Our power as humanitarian actors today, is about influencing decisions making about our collective future informed by the voices of the communities. In order to do this we need to turn our values into actions and not hide behind them. We need to engage new and sometimes unpopular stakeholders. We need to have uncomfortable conversations. We need to step in to unfamiliar territory.

Being accountable means using our power to influence as a humanitarian community the decisions that are made on lives and livelihood of people. Over these last three days, we have defined our collective obligations towards humanity for the next four years. In this 32nd International Conference, we have/will have passed 9 resolutions. Coming to the Conference, the evaluation shows that only 50% of resolutions adopted were implemented. This begs the question: what is our collective accountability to the people for the decisions we adopted in these spaces as humanitarian community? Who is accountable to who? What is the point of spending all of the hours negotiating the text, spending the time debating the substance and context if we have no intentions of implementing them where it really matters. There are things we can easily do but we are not doing it. We need to explore why. How do we follow p to support compliance, conduct 360° of monitoring? Ultimately, this is about fulfilling our collective obligations and being accountable to the people we serve.

We have started a humanitarian dialogue not discussing new things but in a new conversation about old challenges. This has reaffirm that we do not need change the substance of what we are doing but we need to change the way we are doing it.
It was very interesting to see that the outcomes of the five thematic sessions matched the outcomes of the Vision Lab in a way that several key strategic questions should be addressed going forward. Key matching themes were the need for more collaboration & trust building, accountability & decisions-making, matching opposing voices, and putting communities at the center of our action.