

## **Rethinking Humanitarianism**

Episode 8

Aid's Climate Challenge

### **Greta Thunberg**

I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act. I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if the house was on fire. Because it is.

### **Heba Aly**

These famous words from Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, a stark reminder that – while not so long ago climate change was associated with the disappearance of coral reefs and polar bears and some very distant future – in recent years, the humanitarian impacts of climate change have become very real.

### **VOA News**

Aid agencies are having to adapt to more frequent natural disasters.

### **Governor of California**

Today, I'm declaring a drought emergency in the state of California.

### **VOA News**

Scientists say Typhoon Haiyan is one of the strongest storms ever to make landfall.

### **UNHCR**

Cyclone Amphan has devastated hundreds of families who have lost hundreds of shelters.

### **Filippo Grandi, High Commissioner, UNHCR**

This is not something for the distant future. This is something for here and now.

### **Heba Aly**

Aid workers may not have expressed it this way, but they've been responding to the effects of climate change for years. And while it took some time, humanitarians now see climate change as arguably the biggest threat they face. The trouble is, they don't quite know what to do about it.

## **Andrew Harper, Special Advisor on Climate Change, UNHCR**

This is causing more challenges for people to survive. People will be forced to move. There will be increasing tensions. There will be increasing conflict. If we know the impact of climate change is real, and if we know that there's going to be tens of millions of people made more vulnerable, then we need to be stepping up our game.

## **Heba Aly**

But what is the role of a \$25 billion humanitarian aid industry in a trillion dollar problem? The size of the challenge is well beyond the humanitarian system. Humanitarians are used to parachuting into crises. But in this case, there will be no parachute big enough.

In Geneva, Switzerland, I'm Heba Aly of The New Humanitarian and this is Rethinking Humanitarianism. Today is inauguration day for US President Joe Biden, and you'll have noticed that my co-host Jeremy Konyndyk is conspicuously absent. That's because he's on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. – or so my Twitter feed tells me. Jeremy is now on a leave of absence from the Center for Global Development to support the early phase of the Biden administration. So, very sadly for me – and I'm sure for many listeners – he will be stepping away from the podcast. It's all come together quite recently, as you might imagine, so we'll have more of an update on that for you in our next episode.

Before we dive into today's topic, we wanted to share, as usual, thoughts from listeners. So we have pulled into our virtual studio our audience editor, Whitney Patterson. Hi Whitney.

## **Whitney Patterson**

Hi.

## **Heba Aly**

From what I saw, the Twittersphere had a lot to say about the last episode when we spoke to Syrian doctor Tammam Aloudat about decolonising aid, so give us a sense.

## **Whitney Patterson**

Yeah, the episode received a lot of responses from listeners, perhaps particularly in light of recent events in [Washington] D.C.. In the last episode, Tammam argued that it's unreasonable to expect people working to decolonise the sector to have a perfectly clear vision of how to do that. And that seems to have really resonated with people. Listeners appreciated Tammam's humility in not knowing all the answers, calling out the risks of single heroes for a movement, and that one doesn't need a singular vision in order to call out power imbalances. One particular comment came

from Stuart Vallis, a humanitarian aid worker. He tweeted: “I thought for a while that there should be elected representatives of gender, disability, and youth committees of recipients of aid in each response to inform and guide aid decision-making in each context, could also have monitoring and evaluation role for donors and be included in policy-making and panels. It’s difficult for me to imagine any kind of decolonising project without inclusion of recipients of aid in the leadership of change. I’ve thought for a while that the ‘how’ of change is the difficult bit, but it occurred to me listening that we cannot yet define the ‘what’.” Thoughts, Heba?

### **Heba Aly**

Yeah, really interesting, and it reminds me of a discussion we had just after George Floyd’s murder, about the kind of colonial underpinnings of aid, and somebody said exactly that. Aarathi Krishnan, actually. She said, we need to be very conscious and proactive of who it is who’s going to set the vision for this new kind of aid that we want, and that there may be people who in very good intentions go ahead and try to create an alternative without taking into account that they may not be the right people to be doing it. Of course, the idea of representation of affected people in the governance was a theme throughout the episode and something that’s come up in past episodes as well. And it reminds me of an argument that Arbie Baguios of Aid Re-Imagined submitted to our “Future of Aid” series around citizens’ assemblies, which are increasingly being used in societies to govern difficult questions like abortion and now being discussed in the context of climate change. Could that be used in the humanitarian sector, whereby affected people then create these kinds of bodies that have some influence over the course of events? So, I think there’s a lot of interest in the topic. I’m not sure how much that has practically moved forward, given how complicated governance structures of aid agencies can be, as we discussed in one of the episodes on multilateralism. I would say, though, that there has been, at least – you know he mentions panels – at least some movement in ensuring that affected people are represented in that kind of fora. The Global Refugee Forum that UNHCR hosted in Geneva back in December 2019 was an example of that, where you had government delegations showing up with refugees as part of their delegations, sitting side by side with ministers, and having that kind of equal voice. So, a bit of change in that direction, but clearly a long way to go.

### **Whitney Patterson**

If any listeners out there want to join the discussion, we encourage you to either reach out on Twitter, or you can send us a voice note or email to [rhpodcast@thenewhumanitarian.org](mailto:rhpodcast@thenewhumanitarian.org).

### **Heba Aly**

Thank you, Whitney.

## **Whitney Patterson**

Good luck.

## **Heba Aly**

I guess I need it because today's topic is a tough one. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration just announced that 2020 – as if it wasn't bad enough – ranks as the second-hottest year on record. The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies estimates that by 2050 the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance every year as a result of storms, droughts, and floods could double to 200 million people. In its worst-case projections, the Federation estimates that climate-related humanitarian costs will reach \$20 billion per year by 2030, which is almost the cost of the entire humanitarian response sector. The humanitarian playbook just isn't equipped for a mega-crisis like this, and it has very little time to prepare.

So what kind of rethink is necessary to the way aid agencies work in the face of this impending threat? To answer that question, I'm joined by Paul Knox Clarke, who was, for a long time, the head of research at the humanitarian network, ALNAP, and produced the State of the Humanitarian System report, one of the key reports that regularly assesses the humanitarian system's effectiveness across a range of indicators. He also has, interestingly, a change management background, which gives him a particular lens on how institutions think through the way they change. He's now launching something called the Complex Humanitarian Crises initiative to help the humanitarian sector adapt to complex crises like climate change. Welcome to the podcast, Paul.

## **Paul Knox Clarke**

Thank you, Heba. And thanks so much for asking me on today. I'm a big fan of the podcast.

## **Heba Aly**

And joining us from the Filipino capital, Manila, is Donna Lagdameo, the senior policy adviser and Asia Pacific focal point for the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, which was the first institution dedicated to looking at climate change within the humanitarian context, actually initiated at the time of COP6 back in the year 2000. Welcome, Donna.

## **Donna Lagdameo**

Thank you. Thank you for having me. And hello, Paul.

**Paul Knox Clarke**

Hi.

**Heba Aly**

Now, as custom, we always start the podcast by asking guests, what one weird quirk in the humanitarian sector just makes no sense to you? Paul, what comes to your mind?

**Paul Knox Clarke**

For quite a long time, I have been involved in and also surprised by the fact that a sector which is so reliant on flexibility and speed has a kind of policy system which seems to be so stuck in repeating and going round the same argument sometimes for decades. And also, you know, a system that is so often involved in collecting and working on information and data that's been gathered, has a policy system, and has policy kind of made – often the agenda seems to be more based on opinion than on all the evidence that's out there. So that's the one that I think is weird. I would say that of course because I've been part of that policy system for, you know, in a small way, for years, as you said. And three or four years ago, I was asking, talking to someone and saying, you know, what do you think the big thing that humanitarians should be worried about now is? And they said climate change. And I said “oh, that's weird”, and slightly left it at that. So, you know, that kind of tunnel vision piece is something that I have certainly played my part in as well.

**Heba Aly**

How long ago was that?

**Paul Knox Clarke**

That was about four years ago.

**Heba Aly**

Oh, wow. That's scary.

**Paul Knox Clarke**

Obviously things have changed since then.

**Heba Aly**

Wow. Donna, what about you? What's something you've never really understood about the humanitarian system?

## **Donna Lagdameo**

I live in the Philippines, right. So, we call ourselves as a country, we are the supermarket of disasters, or the 7/11 of disasters. We are open seven days a week, 24 hours a day. So that's a very good tagline, right? So what I couldn't understand, since I was a little girl, is you know already that the disaster is happening, the typhoon is happening, and everything – all the preparedness work – are being done, but preparedness to respond, or being prepared to rescue. But knowing that things will happen, but then you prepare for things after the fact. So that was something that I always wondered, even as a child living in this kind of environment. We're exposed always to typhoons etc.

## **Heba Aly**

So, tell us a bit more about that? Help us set the scene of the reality of climate change's impact in the Philippines and on your life.

## **Donna Lagdameo**

Um, a lot of things. So when I was growing up, we could, it was very, on the dot. Summer starts in March. It rains in June. So, we can plan our lives ahead. So it was very normal, it was routine, to sit, to be clear about what you do next. But growing up, especially now that I have kids, it's so hard to say, okay, girls, you have classes, you don't need to bring umbrellas, or something, because it won't rain, because it's summer, or something like that. It's no longer like that. Things are just so abrupt.

## **Heba Aly**

Unpredictable?

## **Donna Lagdameo**

Unpredictable. Yeah, that's the term. And then recently, I have to say, you might have heard, in December, we had four super-typhoons, one after the other. It was crazy, and I live in Manila – we're not the first area to be hit by these typhoons. But the wind was so strong, and we felt like our roof would be [blown] away. And we are at the heart of the metropolis. So, I think that it's scary when you actually live through it. And it's confusing. So hard to have that kind of, you need to live in a way that is unpredictable all the time. I've seen, also, how we've changed from saving lives. I've seen how the country evolved in terms of preparing, moving people [out] of harm's way. So now we no longer count the number of deaths, because I think we've perfected the art of moving people away from harm. But the impact on livelihoods, on houses, on everything else is just dramatic. So I think the shifting of all of these things has just become too personal, especially for us living on the ground in areas like this.

## **Heba Aly**

And it's interesting that you raised that, because every year we publish a list of 10 crises on the horizon to watch in the year ahead. And this year's list looks at climate change exactly through that angle, that it's no longer the individual crisis that is the problem because now the casualty numbers are lower due to better preparedness and so on. But it's the fact that it's one after the other. And so you really can't; you have no chance to recover before the next storm hits. And it's that perpetual cycle.

## **Donna Lagdameo**

Exactly, the sequential nature of it. The concept that, ok, after you respond, you have time to prepare and then you have to recover. No, it all happens at the same time.

## **Paul Knox Clarke**

And it's fundamental what you're saying there, because it's re-writing – the emerging reality is re-writing – so many of the rules and so many of the things that we don't even know we're taking for granted, you know, in humanitarian work; about what the difference is between humanitarian and development, when a crisis starts and when it finishes, what we count as a crisis and what we don't count as a crisis. All of those things, I think, have to be open to challenge. And what I thought Donna, you said there, really fascinating, and I just wanted to underline it is, how do you prepare for things you can't predict? That, I think, is a real classic because you were talking about the unpredictable and the confusion that comes into the unpredictable.

## **Donna Lagdameo**

I think it's preparing for the unpredictable, but compounded by so many other things. So, the complexity of it all is just, everything is interconnected. And so I think it's a combination of complexity, uncertainty, compounding risk, and all those things.

## **Paul Knox Clarke**

And it's a real challenge to everything that we think we know and we know is good practice. Because, generally, if we don't know what's going on, we look for enough information, you know, so that we can kind of come up with an answer. But the sort of situations you're talking about are the sort of situations where, however much information you have, there's so many moving parts, they're moving so quickly, that no information you have will ever be enough. And we have to come up with new ways of responding, preparing for and responding to those situations.

## **Donna Lagdameo**

And it challenges our systems, totally. The existing system is no longer viable for what we're experiencing now. So, it's not just about us finding ways to respond properly or effectively; but also allowing a system to make it happen, to allow us to do new things. And it's exploring new things, because it's a different time, the new normal. And the new normal will really bring us different types of tweakings here and there, from mindset to policies to action to what have you.

## **Heba Aly**

So, I want to get into all of that. Both what you've been talking about Paul, in terms of the need to reconfigure the way we think about planning for the unpredictable, and also what you've just referenced Donna, on shifts in mindsets and policy and all the rest of it. But just to first understand where we stand, when you say the existing system is no longer viable for what we're experiencing now, how have you seen the existing system react in the face of the threat as it now stands? How have humanitarians been engaging, for instance in the Philippines, in reaction to climate change?

## **Donna Lagdameo**

The national policy says that there's a DRR (disaster risk reduction) council, you have funds etc. But you can only use the funds for response if there is a declaration of a state of calamity. So that's the system, that's the current system. However, humanitarians, communities, CSOs (civil society organisations), Red Cross are all trying to find ways to do things two steps ahead of time, right? To be able to anticipate actions. So, for example, in the Philippines, we were doing this initiative, and we were talking with the local government unit, "okay, once we have this threshold, we unlock the funds etc. and we can do the actions." And then the governor said to us, "but Donna, if I do that, I will be charged with misaligning of funds or misappropriation of funds." Because the system does not allow me to do that – that anticipatory side of things. So, it's just not responsive. We are saying, "okay, we need to prepare ahead of time," but it's not possible. So there are some areas in the policy that is just giving us a hard time to do that.

## **Heba Aly**

And, Paul, is that something you've seen on a broader scale when you, I mean, you said that four years ago climate change wasn't even on the radar. But you've watched the sector and its performance and effectiveness, both in the kind of more traditional crises that the sector is used to – responding to drought in rural parts of Africa – and then you've watched it as it struggles to respond to newer kinds of crises like Ebola, the European migration crises, the pandemic now, and of course, climate change. How do you see differences in effectiveness and performance?



## **Paul Knox Clarke**

There's a variety of ways that humanitarians are engaging with the climate emergency, and they probably run along a sort of scale from, kind of the actions that agencies are taking to sort of decrease their own impact on the climate: so, mitigation-type activities right through to the response stuff when there is a crisis which has been caused or exaggerated by climate at the other end. And on that, you've got activities around adaptation, which are often sort of resilience-type work being done. People like the Red Cross Red Crescent movement and START Fund and others are doing a lot of exciting work around anticipatory approaches. So kind of getting in earlier to respond. And thinking about, actually, how do we respond when those things haven't worked? You know, how do we respond to more frequent, bigger crises of kinds that are much more complex and that we don't necessarily have previous experience of responding to? So you've got those different things. I think resilience. Humanitarians can make a probably quite small contribution to developmental action that's being done as part of government approaches and part of government structures. It's much, much harder to do anything successful where there's weak governance and fragile states, where it's kind of small-scale resilience pieces. I would say it's just fabulous to see that humanitarians are engaging with that, despite some possible problems, because before 2011 and the Somali famine situation, not doing anticipation was kind of a failure of ambition. But after 2011, and with all of the work that was done to kind of try and get early warning systems improved and work by ODI and Oxfam and people like that, not doing anticipation from 2011 onwards has really been a failure of responsibility. And now, I think humanitarians are pitching up late, but pitching up to our responsibilities around anticipatory work. The concern I have is, how many humanitarian organisations have not seriously thought about the response part? You know. Have not seriously responded thought about when a crisis hits, and the resilience and anticipation have not covered for that, and there are possibly tens, possibly hundreds of millions of people affected, how are humanitarian agencies going to fit into some sort of huge response for which they're not financed, not necessarily skilled, and not structured? And that is a big, I think that's still for most agencies, a very big and very open question.

## **Heba Aly**

Especially when you take into account the fact that, as you've said in the past, these crises are locked in, it's not even a question of are they going to happen or not? We know that they're barreling towards us, and at a scale at which the world has never really seen, even if COVID is something of a lesson of what these kinds of mega-crises look like.

## **Paul Knox Clarke**

So much so. I mean, this, you know, to use the phrase "this changes everything", you know. All human life on this planet has existed in conditions which no longer apply. So, everything is different or is going to be different very soon, depending on where in the world you live. And it's

really important I think, Heba, that you bring that up, because often, I think we think about – or we have thought about – climate change as thinking, you know, when the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) very carefully says, “these things will happen by 2050 or by 2100”. The humanitarian mindset, which is quite responsive, I know, is to think that means in 2050. It doesn't mean in 2050. It means these things could happen next week. And actually COVID has shown us that not only could they happen next week, but they do happen next week. And the question I'd have for the big agencies is, if it happens next week, what are you going to do?

### **Heba Aly**

And what is it about the way that they are currently structured that to your mind makes them unprepared to deal with this?

### **Paul Knox Clarke**

I think there are a bunch of things, and some of them are well beyond their ability. I mean, obviously, financing is one. And that's much more about bigger conversations around sort of loss and damage discussions that are happening at the COP and the positions that the rich world governments take to those discussions. And I think there is also, perhaps, increasingly going to be some questions around the legal architecture as well. And those are sort of outside what any individual or even perhaps collective of agencies can address. But at the agency level, the first question for an agency is “have you thought about how your core business, how your core response activities, will work in these situations which are bigger, more frequent, and are unlike situations that you've had before?” And there, the closest thing is COVID and Ebola that you pointed out earlier. You know, what did we learn from those? Yeah. So first of all, having a think about it. I think what many agencies would conclude when they've done that is that they're probably too international, they probably have very long supply chains, they're probably reliant on being able to move staff and goods around the world, rather than on localised approaches, which are not just, you know, an ideological thing. They are good practice in a world where you can't move stuff around, as we've seen in COVID. So, they're actually operationally critical. So, how do you make your response more resilient, I think, in... what's called a degraded environment – when you can't fly people around, when your IT isn't working, when you have to do things much more locally. That's one set of changes that needs to be made. Second set of changes is around flexibility. And that's something that we saw, you know, with Ebola. I think it's something we've seen with COVID. Something we saw, as you mentioned, also with European migration is, is this agency able to go into a situation it doesn't understand, do things it hasn't done before, with partners perhaps it hasn't worked with before, and build it as it plays it? And that has real implications for what kind of data are you collecting, and how. It has implications for who makes decisions in your organisation. How delegated and how decentralised are those decisions? It has implications for purchasing and supply chains, you know – how do you change them quickly from one thing to another as the

needs change? And it has really significant implications for, who do we think we are? You know. What's our role? Are we really the bosses? Do we own this crisis? Or are we trying to identify gaps, and be flexible enough to fill the gaps as they appear in civil society response? So that's a few things.

**Heba Aly**

Just a few...

**Paul Knox Clarke**

It's just a start.

**Heba Aly**

I see Donna you're kind of nodding and taking notes, so I'm assuming you're going to add to that list now?

**Donna Lagdameo**

Yeah, I think it's a very long and intense list. Um, just [to] add a few points here and there. I think one of the biggest challenges we have is the notion of, we actually build resilience today for the risks of tomorrow. So, what is happening is we're just addressing and thinking of the stuff that is happening now. But we're not forward-looking enough to really give us that edge in preparedness and planning response work. What is actually happening right now is just we're responding to current risks, nothing more. And I think we need to move away from that. And even in the humanitarian sector, I think what would be really good to see is how to shift the mindset and really focus on risk-informed actions – because I think it will help us even deal with the losses and damages. Look at the risks that will lead to the losses, and risks that will lead to the damages, and not just wait for the losses and damages to happen before we actually do things.

And this is I think something that is high on the agenda of all the global agreements, right, and experiences on the ground. I think a lot of communities, a lot of governments, a lot of CSOs and humanitarian organisations have yet to really change that mindset in terms of looking at the disasters as risks that can be reduced. So, I wouldn't just anticipate four or five days before, just like what we're doing in forecast-based financing, we only have that lead time, because that's the only lead time that we can get from forecasting agencies – that they're very sure that the typhoon will actually move in a certain direction. But if we were situated on a longer timescale, then we can actually help do things in advance and analyse the actions that we can take. Just one brief point on the finance that Paul mentioned earlier – I think one of the things that we can see, globally, is that the humanitarian relief and funding is paid by voluntary support. I think there's no global ownership on the financing side of things. Unlike, for example, in the climate issue, where the

debate on climate finance is very strong, because the responsibilities are being owned by the international community. On the response side, the financing is owned by the response donors. So, I think that it's just something that we can see right now. I don't have yet any solution.

### **Heba Aly**

Well, is there a way of kind of channelling more of the climate funds, which anyway are much bigger than the relatively pathetic amounts of humanitarian funding out there, towards humanitarian agencies who are actually dealing with the damages of climate change?

### **Donna Lagdameo**

The problem with our financing community is that they have their own semantics. So climate finance can only be released for climate actions. You cannot have a disaster word when you submit a proposal for an adaptation project, because that's how the system works. So what we are seeing as a common ground that will allow us to unlock all these financing mechanisms is to really anchor in risks. The climate community is highlighting the climate risk side, the disaster committee is also on the risk side. Now, if we put our narratives in the risk, if we do that, actually it is something that we are seeing as able to connect in terms of accessing finance in the climate side. So a clear example is: what recently was approved by the Green Climate Fund in the Philippines is the first GCF project in the Philippines – it's about enhancing the hydromat office and building their capacity in impact-based forecasting, which essentially will help us beef up our preparedness actions on the ground and allow us to do anticipatory action. So it's not directly humanitarian, but it's answering a need both for the climate side, which is also useful for us operating on the ground. So these are our areas. And in the recent GCF Board meeting, two more projects were approved with anticipatory actions and forecast-based financing elements in them. So, I think it is getting there. Plus, of course, the mandate was given to the GCF to finance more loss and damage. And so this is really, I have a lot of faith in this pathway. Looking at these areas where the humanitarian, the disaster, the development, the DRR community, the climate community, really converge. And it's that kind of mindset: the risk-informed, risk-centered kind of approach.

### **Paul Knox Clarke**

Just on the finance piece, because something that you said Heba, I think is really important. Obviously, any loss and damage financing is going to be required across many, many different bases, and I think the humanitarian sector, as you pointed out, a small part of this, should not be looking for a disproportionate part of that financing. But more importantly, I think that financing should not go to a sector as it is currently constructed, which is really good, really well designed to deal with the food insecurity situations of the 1980s. So that financing should only really be coming to humanitarians, when humanitarians have shown that they are actually up for working in the future. And a lot of that is about intermediation, to use that horrible word. Really, the money

should be going on the people who are showing that they know what to do. And my limited experience, I'm sure Donna has much more experience in this, is the people who at the moment are the experts in preparedness and response are communities. They're not, you know, they're not necessarily as we said, a lot of agencies are not there yet. And so it would be very worrying if money were being taken, or being soaked up, and wasn't getting where it could be most effective. My concern about anticipation is, whilst it worked extremely well for things where the risks can be calculated, things that can be anticipated, I think there are demonstrably quite a number of things where that's not the case. And even some of the things that we're used to calculating like hurricanes, cyclones, wildfires, and we can say how they have been seen in the past and predict how they will work, my understanding is that some of that prediction is becoming less and less effective – with the Australian wildfires, for example, with storms in the Caribbean, the amount of time is no longer four or five days, it's less than 24 hours. So there's a real challenge there. But also, of course, we all know that natural disasters are not necessarily crises. Crises are where the natural disaster integrates with the social, economic, and political system. And that can be very, very hard, as we've seen with COVID, that can be very hard to anticipate, particularly when things are happening that haven't happened before.

### **Heba Aly**

It's those knock-on effects.

### **Paul Knox Clarke**

Knock-on effects. One big call I would make is for humanitarians to look, you know, to really scrutinise what are the sorts of things where anticipation is a really good approach – and there are many – and what are the sorts of things we need to prepare for where anticipation maybe will give us a false sense of security, and we need a different kind of, more adaptive approach to those.

### **Donna Lagdameo**

Anticipatory action, I agree, will not save all our problems I think. But it is something that will allow us to do more, I think – to save more lives and move people early on and all those things. So it is something that will add on to the long list of things that we are doing well, doing together, with different actors in different groups. And also, what we're seeing in the Philippines is that, unless it's really institutionalised and it's part of the government system, anticipatory action will not be possible. Because we've had a lot of heartaches when we were doing anticipatory work or forecast-based financing only in small pockets of areas. And then suddenly, the typhoon decided to go another way, and it was just impossible. I remember those days when cash transfers were just not yet accepted. I think this is happening with forecast-based financing and anticipatory action because it's just being piloted here and there. Unless it's the system who will really adopt it, the humanitarians plus the government, I think it will not meet its full potential.

## **Paul Knox Clarke**

I think we'll know that things are more likely to work when the cultures that, you know, we've all been part of sometimes, this way not that way, either or. You know, it's either anticipation or its response. It's either resilience or its response. You know, those cultures do still exist in our business. You know, it's either cash or, you know, everything must be cash. No, it's always both/and. You know, it's always got to be humble enough to recognise that the other guys, and women, have got some pretty good ideas too.

## **Heba Aly**

Coming back to your point Donna earlier about, we need to be building resilience today for the risks not just of tomorrow but well down the line, I don't quite see how humanitarians can do that when they're already so strapped. They can barely even respond to – not even the risks of tomorrow – but the crises of today. How are they supposed to be able to then add to that this whole other portfolio of long-term resilience-building? I think many would say: "That's not our job. We can't even do the limited response work that is our job, and now you're putting on us all of this kind of long-term resilience-building." How do you see that working?

## **Donna Lagdameo**

Well, first of all, I think we should also recognise that humanitarians are not the only ones doing the work. Your response operations are only as good as your level of preparedness, and your level of preparedness is only as good as your level of risk reduction, and so on and so forth. And I think we need to do work on it hand in hand. So, bring in the climate people and help us see the science, the risk, all those things, bring the DRR, the development, and we all work together, ok. In response operations, here are lessons A, B, C, D. This did not work, this worked etc. And then we plot it in a future scenario. Okay, I think this will not [work]. So, that calibrating, recalibrating, relearning, and learning etc. will be iterative and will continue. Because you're very correct, it's just impossible for one sector to just do all the thinking and all the planning. And, of course, the most important thing – we need to bring the communities into the planning part of this because some sectors feel that they need to teach communities. Actually, the communities know more. They know which cave to run to. I remember there was a story during Haiyan, immediately after Haiyan, we were talking with the communities who were first hit by the super-typhoon. And those who were saved rushed to a specific cave that helped them survive. And so they have a lot of practices that we don't have, that probably don't fit to our global terminologies. They work, on the ground.

## **Paul Knox Clarke**

And, of course, in the climate conversation, "they" very quickly becomes "we".

**Donna Lagdameo**

Totally. I agree.

**Paul Knox Clarke**

As we've seen with COVID, you know, we are the "they" – this distinction between, you know, isn't there anymore, is it? And this is something I think that will actually, another of those kinds of paradigms that we're used to, is going to, depending on where we are in the world, is going to change very quickly. And when that changes, what else changes with it? You know, I think COVID has been really interesting there. Actually, we've seen from COVID, that it's down to each and everybody, and the degree to which they wear a mask, and the degree to which they're vaccinated, and the degree to which they talk to their friends, that's brought home to us the, you know, the reality is it was always about people. And then the technical and, you know, the sort of force-maximising aspect of the organisation is rather different from that we might think when we're sort of in the organisation.

**Donna Lagdameo**

That message needs to resonate with everyone. It's a collective responsibility. We all have roles. We all have tasks to do. If we want to make this work, we really just need to work together.

**Heba Aly**

And you've mentioned that a few times Donna, about breaking up these silos and the need to have a platform that brings these different sectors together. You talked about learning and relearning. Paul, I wanted to hear from you about the Complex Humanitarian Crises initiative, or CHC, that you're trying to get off the ground because it aims to address, really, some of these challenges. Tell us about it.

**Paul Knox-Clarke**

Yes, this is something that I've become engaged in with a couple of colleagues: reaching out to humanitarian organisations but critically, not trying to make it a humanitarian club, but also to civil society organisations that are maybe engaged in humanitarian action: women's organisations, youth organisations, and private sector and climate academics as well, to really look at this element of the response parts. You know, when the anticipation, when the resilience, when the mitigation fails, what are agencies going to do then? And what are we going to do for the most vulnerable? And I think what's developing from conversations that we're having with this broad stakeholder group is, it would be very useful to many actors to collate all of the information that's available to say exactly what is the nature of the things that we need to be prepared for. How often? Where? When? Because there's loads of great stuff out there, and just bringing it together

for decision-makers in agencies. So there's a kind of collation role, Secondly, there seems to be a lot of appetite for each individual organisation to then do what we were saying earlier and say, "well, so what is our role going to be in this, because maybe we need to move away from the humanitarian system back to organisations thinking what their particular response is. And so, if this happens, what are we going to do as an agency?" And helping agencies help each other to do that is the second piece. And then thirdly, providing support to the change management that's required, because that will require, as we've said, conceptual changes, structural changes in the organisations to make them more agile and more localised, procedural changes as well. So what we're hoping to do in the CFC is to provide a platform, you talked about platform earlier Donna, where agencies can collate the information, work with each other to come up with their own plan about how they're going to deal with this global crisis, and then support each other to make the changes that are going to be required to be the kind of organisations that can take part in that. So, we're having great conversations – not a lot of donor funding yet – but great conversations, so watch this space.

### **Heba Aly**

On every episode, we try to release guests from the constraints of thinking within the current systems and frameworks and say, if you could wave your magic wand and kind of introduce an idea that would address all of the changes that you feel are necessary – all of the dysfunction, all of the lack of preparedness – what would be your million-dollar, trillion-dollar idea for the humanitarian sector, for the climate sector more broadly as you wish? Donna?

### **Donna Lagdameo**

My wish, I think for us to just think, act, and work as people, as one. I think the biggest frustration right now is because the institutions, the mindsets, are all just, "you do this, I only do up to here", and you know, that silo thing is just killing us. For me, I dream of a world when nobody will say, "I'm a climate person, you're a response person, you're a DRR person, I'm a development person, and we have different tasks." I dream of a day when we all just say, "come on, let's see what the problem is, let's work with communities, let's find ways to reduce our vulnerabilities, and let's find ways to be resilient together." I don't know if that dream will happen.

### **Heba Aly**

A utopian world indeed. Paul, what about you? What's your multi-million-dollar idea?

### **Paul Knox Clarke**

It's not multi-million, and it's not my idea. But it's my wish. And actually, I think it's very close to what Donna was saying. I think my wish is that we have a Copernican revolution. We stop thinking



that, you know, everything circles around us, and we recognise that we circle around it. So that going forward, you know, humanitarians, we're all able to take a step back and recognise that we are a small, often small planet, circling around a crisis. And there are many other planets circling around in different orbits around that solar system. We are not the sun, we're not at the centre of it. And I think what that would mean would be, the first question we'd ask ourselves is not, "what are we going to do?" The first question we'd ask ourselves each and every time would be, "where do we fit in?" And, in a way, it's kind of a little thing, but it might make a difference.

### **Heba Aly**

Thank you to both of you for beginning to outline what kind of rethinking is necessary if the humanitarian sector is to be equipped to deal with this, this massive threat barreling towards us. I think you've laid out a number of ways in which the sector will need to change and how it works, how it works with others, and how it thinks, as you've both said, so thank you very much.

### **Donna Lagdameo**

Thank you.

### **Paul Knox-Clarke**

Thank you, Heba.

If you have thoughts on the role of humanitarians and climate change, tweet your comments or questions to us @cgdev and @newhumanitarian with the hashtag #rethinkinghumanitarianism. Or send us a voice recording, we'd love to have your voice on the podcast, to [rhpodcast@thenewhumanitarian.org](mailto:rhpodcast@thenewhumanitarian.org). If you're a regular listener, we'd really appreciate you leaving a review of the podcast to help other people discover it. And as always, to learn more about the topics we tackle on the podcast, head to [thenewhumanitarian.org](http://thenewhumanitarian.org) or check out [cgdev.org](http://cgdev.org). Thank you for listening to Rethinking Humanitarianism. See you next time.