Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

Event

“2022 Washington Humanitarian Forum: Closing the Gap”

Plenary Panel: The Changing Landscape: Engaging Non-traditional Partners

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FEATURING

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Welcome back, everyone. Please take your seats, and we’ll get started.

Welcome back, everyone, for the plenary panel for the second humanitarian forum at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Whether you’re joining us here in person or online, we are grateful for you to be here.

For those of us that joined us for our introductory discussion this morning, we talked about the state of the humanitarian sector, including ALNAPS state of the sector report. We also talked with Sarah Charles from USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Affairs.

We covered a lot of ground, including some of the issues around localization, the funding gap that we continue to see, and now the conversation continues. This conversation will be led by Beza Tesfaye. She’s a senior associate with the CSIS Project on Fragility and Mobility.

Beza – (speaks in a foreign language) – for leading this. Thank you. Over to you.

Thank you, Kimberly, and good morning, to all of you here in the audience. Also, good morning to everyone who is joining us virtually.

As Kimberly mentioned, I'm Beza Tesfaye. I’m affiliated with the program on Fragility and Mobility here at CSIS. I’m also director of research and learning for climate change and migration at Mercy Corps, which is an international development and humanitarian organization.

I’m extremely honored to be moderating this discussion on the changing humanitarian landscape, and we are privileged to have with us, both here in person and virtually, four exceptional panelists – and I really mean that – that have been working for many years in many different ways to help improve the effectiveness of the humanitarian sector and its ability to respond to communities in crises.

Our panelists have a rich and diverse set of experiences and backgrounds, and I’m really eager to exchange and engage with them. But before introducing them, I just want to very, very briefly share a few of my own thoughts to help frame the discussion.

As we sit here this morning, we’re all aware that the world is in a state of significant financial, political, and ecological turbulence, which, of course, has implications for the humanitarian sector and our ability to respond to humanitarian needs.

The United Nations estimates that in 2022 over 200 million people worldwide require humanitarian assistance, and only a third of the
resources needed to respond – which is a record $48.7 billion – only a third of this has been met. This is by far the largest shortfall in humanitarian finance that we have ever seen.

But as you can observe in this graph, this gap has expanded gradually over the years, even as humanitarian finance has steadily increased over the same time period. Why are we seeing this growing gap, and how do we respond? These are some of the critical questions that this panel will discuss.

And obviously there are many avenues from which we can try to discuss this challenge, but I want to highlight just a couple of entry points for our conversation.

First, humanitarian needs are primarily driven by complex protracted crises. So if you look at this map, which displays all of the active U.N. humanitarian appeals from 2022, you’ll notice something.

Many of the countries with active humanitarian appeals are affected by conflict or insecurity. Several are also highly climate vulnerable characterized by low levels of adaptive capacity and high exposure to climate-related disasters. These are countries that we generally refer to as fragile countries.

Importantly, while it’s less apparent from this map, humanitarian appeals for these fragile countries have been active for several consecutive years. Ten years for Haiti, Mali, Niger, Yemen. Fifteen years for Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, and Chad. And an astonishing 20 consecutive years for the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, and Sudan. So it’s evident that the humanitarian sector really has to think about how we address the challenge of fragility.

A second entry point for our discussion is around opportunities for engaging new partners. There is untapped potential to work more with the private sector, as well as with local responders, including civil society and NGOs, to help expand and increase the effectiveness of humanitarian responses. And while this opportunity has been long recognized, we continue to struggle with establishing equitable long-term partnerships that translate into deep engagement with nontraditional actors.

So as you can see, there’s much to discuss, and I would love to bring in our panelists to help me think and discuss these issues, but first, let me briefly introduce our speakers.

To my left is Maria Kisumbi, who is director of policy and government relations at Humanity United. Maria is a Ugandan that was born in Tanzania and raised in Kampala, Uganda, where she spent 11 of her – 11 years of her
early professional career. Prior to joining Humanity, Maria was a senior human rights and governance technical advisor for the Uganda National Planning Authority at the German Development Cooperation. She has a master’s degree in global health law from Georgetown, a Bachelor of Law from Makerere University and a post-graduate diploma from the Law Development Center in Uganda.

To my far left is Sadie Bynum, who is the global emergency response manager at Airbnb.org. Sadie joined Airbnb.org in 2021. Prior to that, she was appointed director of the Philadelphia Office of Emergency Management in 2018. She was also a presidential appointee under the Obama and Trump administrations, where she was deployed to manage and respond to several large-scale incidents as a federal coordinating officer. Sadie has also served as a director of emergency preparedness for the NYC Housing Authority, and the NYC Office of Emergency Management. And she’s also served as a public safety advisor to the chief executive officer of the DeKalb County, Georgia.

And then, joining us virtually we have Andrej Kirn, who is head of the International Organizations and Humanitarian Agenda at the World Economic Forum. Andrej leads efforts to deepen and codesign multistakeholder collaboration between the World Economic Forum and international organizations to tackle key global challenges for a more sustainable future. He focuses on bringing together humanitarian and development actors with corporations and investors to design long-term approaches and protracted settings – that combined humanitarian impact with financial returns. Andrej has also formally served on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia and the EU delegation to the state of Israel.

Finally, we have Chilande Kuloba-Warria, who is the founder and managing director of Warande Advisory Centre. Chilande has 18 years of experience providing strategic leadership and management and technical assistance to local, international, and national development organizations. She has worked on a wide range of sectors, including youth development, governance, and sustainable livelihoods. Her work has extended across Africa, and recently, Chilande has played a leadership role in a nationwide consultative process to develop national standards of competence and sustainability for NGOs in Kenya.

Welcome to all of you. We are really grateful to have you here with us. I would like to turn to you first, Andrej, and have you sort of share some opening remarks with us and tell us a bit about your work. And specifically, as I mentioned, we are in this situation where we see enormous humanitarian finance gaps and growing needs.
So I would love if you could tell us a bit about the role of the World Economic Forum, and how the forum is fostering dialogues, partnerships to address this challenge. The floor is yours.

Andrej Kirn: Thank you, Beza. Delighted to be part of this panel. Good morning, and good afternoon, from Geneva.

I would actually start that perhaps framing this as a closing the funding gap may not be the starting point where we’re trying to engage with a lot of these new traditional voices. We may speak about this especially of the perspective of the private sector.

I think from our view it’s really about how to we build collaboration, but also support coexistence in areas where we can jointly address fragility and, as you have mentioned, protracted crises. For us, it’s really about how do we complement some of the more traditional relief efforts together with more sustainable and long-term approach through investments in areas that strengthen the resilience of communities, but also help to recover, rebuild, or strengthen local markets.

And for that to happen, we really believe that more closer collaboration, more coordinated collaboration between the humanitarian eco system, foundations, development finance institutions, corporates and investors really have the potential to unlock more financially sustainable models that address some of these long-term systemic challenges.

And I want to say this and kind of the three main trends or movements that we’ve been observing since being involved in this space, and I think the first one – and a lot of this was already discussed in the opening – is the kind of more opening of working with new partners, especially also business, in delivering humanitarian action.

I think accompanied with that there’s also been quite a lot of experimentation, and by now successful implementation of sort of new financing models by the humanitarian ecosystem. But what we’re seeing is that a lot of this, because of the nature of responsiveness, remains reactionary. A lot of it is still short term. It kind of – it stops too often at a pilot stage.

And I think we can be honest to say it’s not applicable to all geographies. I think the type of response in Ukraine is not necessarily the type of response, especially in terms of how businesses come in, that we would be able to emulate in other parts of the world to the same extent.
And that sort of collaboration, while it’s positive momentum, it opens new areas of working together, I think still puts us within that kind of aid perspective and support and funding through the humanitarian ecosystem.

Now the other two trends that we’ve been engaging with is, of course, the shift in the various strategies accompanied by this of the development finance community into more fragile context, and I think we’ve seen, also, positive mobilization of DFIs working more closely together.

That goes hand-in-hand, I think, with the growing appetite among some different types of investors to really understand where and how they could deploy their capital for greater societal or environmental impact. And these two trends combined I think puts us a little bit more into kind of an investment perspective that is long term that looks at more commercially driven investments, perhaps more in alignment with the humanitarian ecosystem.

Now, what has the forum done? How have we been engaged? We are an international organization for public-private cooperation, and we’ve really been involved in the space really in the lead up and since the World Humanitarian Summit. And there’s been a couple of different areas that we’ve tried to stimulate both dialogue, but also active collaboration between the public and the private sector.

Before the World Humanitarian Summit, we already had actually a really interesting collaboration between our supply chain partners – and WFP is the head of the logistics cluster. It’s called the Logistics Emergency Teams, and that collaboration – first informal that has now been formalized – continues, and it’s really about deploying asset services and people from those companies in support of the logistics cluster at any given crises when it gets activated.

For a number of years, we had what we call the Global Future Council on Humanitarian Action that was co-chaired by Peter Maurer and Tara Nathan, which really was our incubator to bring together donors, humanitarian agencies, businesses, foundations to think about new approaches, new collaboration in these areas of fragility.

And most recently, the council produced a number of guidelines for complementary action in fragile conflicts really I think underpinning the need for closer collaboration between the two sectors, but also early collaboration to really understand how each can bring their own expertise, skillsets, and assets to this mix.
At a high level, we’ve leveraged our big convenings, such as the annual meeting in Davos, where we’ve traditionally had now for a number of years a humanitarian agenda, and that’s been really to get direct exposure and access between these various sectors at a principal level, at a CEO level, to discuss about some of the challenges, but also to have really frank exchanges about the appetites to collaborate or enter some of these more difficult environments and what needs to happen as a result.

And as a final point, really our sort of main initiative, has been the humanitarian and resilience investing initiative that we launched together with the ICRC and the World Bank back in 2019 at Davos in a way as the backdrop of these three major trends starting to converge. And what we mean by HRI, or Humanitarian Resilience Investing, is really capital that is invested in ways that has a measurable humanitarian societal impact, but provides some level of financial return, and for that it was quite important for us that we had the word investment in order to drive the conversation as an expansion of the broader humanitarian finance discussions that were happening.

But we also wanted to make sure that this was really focused on building and growing sustainable business models that are not necessarily over time grow independent and take away from, I would say, the core humanitarian budgets as you try to scale some of those models. And for us, in trying to drive this approach has been really the importance to look at how do you collaborate, who plays what role, and who deploys what types of resources along the entire value chain of the pipeline development. So how do you start from an idea with sort of an innovative finance in mind? And how do you drive that to market?

We’re not saying that this is an area that should replace. It’s really about complementarity, and it is about trying to figure out where you can strengthen that public-private collaboration. In areas where we know fragility and instability will persist in different forms because of different shocks, and I think climate is just the latest on top of everything else.

But really, how do you work together in support of those collaborations in a way to unlock private capital in those fragile contexts as a way to enable for the concentration of traditional humanitarian funding in really the most acute places.

Ms. Tesfaye: I want to come back to some of the points you mentioned, including how do you get private sector investment flowing to fragile contexts, and would love to hear more about the humanitarian resilience initiative specifically.

But now let me turn it over to Maria to get your opening remarks and your thoughts about how we can think about addressing these challenges.
Specifically, we’ve been discussing the issue of fragility, the fact that a lot of these crises that we’re seeing are drive by a number of environmental, political, conflict-related challenges that are affecting fragile states.

So how is humanity thinking about this challenge, and how are you all engaging to respond?

Thank you, Beza. So maybe before I talk about how we, as Humanity United, respond within fragile contexts, a little bit about Humanity United.

So we are a philanthropic organization that exists to cultivate conditions that advance peace and freedom, and the conditions we are looking at, our agency, shared humanity, responsive and accountable institutions. And even I would like us to take a step back as to why and how we respond, and Beza did a very good job of setting the stage, the tone, and even the previous panel discussion is the moment we are in.

COVID-19 very clearly showed the system inequities. It showed how local actors respond to these humanitarian situations. I remember the previous panel someone was saying a lot of the actors left, and it was the local actors who were responding to those different humanitarian situations.

Then the other is the call for decolonization of development. We saw the brokenness of the aid system, and taking into consideration all these, we, as Humanity United, were able to sit back and revisit how we want to engage within this context.

We took into consideration the pandemic, the rise of autocracy, and also we took into consideration DEIJ, Diversity Equity Inclusion and Justice. With all that in mind, we, as Humanity United, how we are responding is we are really on active journey on devolving power to those closest who are facing conflict and exploitation.

Two, we are really honoring lived experience and the agency of those closest to the issues, and then the third is we really want to practice trust-based approach to philanthropy. What is trust-based approach to philanthropy? It’s really changing the way how we do business. Changing how we respond to situations. Changing how we relate with our partners and building trust and really advancing equity within those relationships.

And lastly, I hope I’ll be able to talk about is accompaniment, which is really a core principle of how do we, as private funders, engage within this context because the actors are closest to the ground. They understand the complexities, the new ones.
There’s some things from far here – I sit in D.C. – actually, I sit in Baltimore – which we can’t even see, and it’s important for us within the private institutions to realize that and see what role is that we play. I thrive best when our partners have the necessary resources and tools that they need to be able to respond to these situations.

Thank you.

Ms. Tesfaye:

Thank you so much, Maria. A lot of great ideas there, and we will have a chance to dig into them, including accompaniment, as you mentioned.

Shifting gears just a little bit, I want to bring Sadie into the conversation, and we’re really lucky to have you with us, Sadie, because you offer a perspective having worked closely with the private sector, and I think Airbnb and Airbnb.org have a very interesting approach, where you’ve developed a global response tool to help peoples in situations of protracted displacement.

So could you tell us a little bit about that response, and how it evolved, and how you all are currently engaged in some of the crises we’re seeing today?

Sadie Bynum:

Yeah, I’d love to, and like Maria, agency is really important for us. And that cocreation with local entities is also important. We also sit further away. We are scattered around the globe, and so it’s really important for us to be directly engaged with those folks who know best what’s needed.

And so we do have a really unique situation. So we have Airbnb.com – the home-sharing platform that lots of you know and love, of course – and we have Airbnb.org, which is an independent nonprofit that was established by one of our founders.

And so the goal for us is to connect individuals, communities to resources, and so we do that. And our main resource, of course, is access to the properties that folks have on Airbnb.com.

And so what we do is we have two tracks. We have a partnership track, where we work through grant funding, and we provide cash grants to organizations that are doing work typically it’s in the humanitarian relief section. We’re working on refugee displacements, asylum seekers, forced or involuntary displacements, resettlements, et cetera.

And then we have another side of the house, which is focused on disaster relief, where we’re looking to provide short-term stays in properties that are listed on Airbnb for folks who have been displaced by disaster from their home, and so we operate in a couple of ways. But what’s really unique is that Airbnb provides funding to us.
It provides resources in terms of staffing, and in terms of the ability to tap into the product, the supply – our host community, which is really the lifeblood of our organization across the enterprise. Without hosts who are willing to offer their properties, sometimes even for free or even at a discount, to those in need, you know, we'd have a much more challenging ability to reach or have an impact globally.

As long as there’s an Airbnb that’s located in an area that is either receiving or accepting folks that are displaced, or there’s an area where there’s been a disaster or crisis that’s impacted folks, we’re able to try and get some folks housed. And then we work with the local entities. Again, thinking through, you know, that co-creation, what is it that they need?

And sometimes it’s a perfect alignment, and what is needed is that temporary short-term stay in one of our properties. We have a couple ways we can do that. Again, through the grant funding, where organizations can book on behalf of those folks who are displaced, and then we offer vouchers, where individuals themselves have that agency to select a property, make a reservation that’s going to fit their needs of themselves and their families. And so that’s really what we’ve done.

What we did in Ukraine is a little different, where we sort of took one program from one side of the house and applied it to this use case, and we were able to be really successful. Our founders, again, made a commitment to house 100,000 folks that were displaced or fleeing Ukraine, and we were able to meet that goal early this year.

And by working with the organizations who were already active in the conflict and housing people, they were able to refer to us folks who were fleeing, and we were, then, in turn, able to issue them vouchers so they could book a stay.

It works really well in a situation like that because where people were going, they weren’t damaged. The properties weren’t damaged. They weren’t destroyed so there was a lot of supply, a lot of interest in our host community again – the folks that are so important to us to being willing to do this work.

And so we were able to meet that goal, and so for us we really recognize that we need that private sector support. We need that local engagement. We need our host community, and we need the ability to be as active as possible.

And so it’s just a really, really special situation for us to be in. There are also times when we realize – again, thinking through that our mission is about connecting to resources – where what’s best needed is not a stay at an Airbnb, and so what we do is look to how can we turn our other private
sector friends? What resources can we collectively combine in order to bring to bear?

And a quick example is in Louisiana for Hurricane Ida there was a state recognized tribal group along the bayou that was not federally recognized, and so it had a much more difficult time to access federal funds. And they did not want to leave, and there were no Airbnb properties in the surrounding area, and so we worked with a private sector entity to get generators brought in to support them where they wanted to remain.

And so they were able to have safe, habitable properties where they wanted to stay, and that’s really, really important to us to always be mindful about what is that agency, what’s best needed for them.

Ms. Tesfaye: Thank you so much, Sadie.

Chilande, one of the key discussions we’ve been having in the humanitarian sector for many years now is the need to engage nontraditional actors, and all of the panelists have already kind of touched on it, but I wanted to get your take.

And by nontraditional actors, we don’t just mean private sector, we also mean local responders, civil society organizations, local NGOs, and you have a lot of experience in this regard, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. So I would love to get your remarks about, you know, how this work has developed, and what are some of the sort of benefits of engaging local organizations and humanitarian response?

Chilande Kuloba-Warria: Fantastic. Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak, and it’s always beautiful to go last because then I can hopefully add on to what has been said.

Allow me to speak very much from my own real lived experience, and sometimes that comes with passion. But allow me to just let it flow into this space because I think this is the best place to put it.

Now, when I have had – I had the honor of listening to the earlier conversation, and I was listening to what the challenges are at the moment within the humanitarian sector and really thinking through the biggest challenge right now being said to be about anticipation and timeliness of addressing some of these humanitarian issues.

And I kept thinking about this young gentleman who goes around Kenya. He has a company – he just basically has a movement that encompasses just himself that he calls Cup of Uji. Uji is Swahili for courage, and that’s really all he can do.
He's just one individual whose task is to identify which communities are struggling, specifically around famine, because he himself grew up in an area where he, you know, in times – with a background where he did not get food, and that’s really what he can do is every time there’s an issue in northeast Kenya, you will go there and you will find him there. You will hear there’s flooding somewhere in the lakeside, you’ll find him there with his, you know, Cup of Ujis.

Now he’s only able to help so many people, right, but does he anticipate? Absolutely, right. He’s the kind of person who looks – who knows through our local cultural knowledge – and whether or not you believe that we have rainmakers or not, we know where the rain is coming.

We can look around and know, you know, right now there’s tensions within the region. We know which countries are feuding with who. You know, DRC at the moment are preparing themselves potentially to fight against Rwanda, you know.

So what I’m saying is that the locals already anticipate, right, and they’re timely. We’ve got this gentleman who goes there with whatever he can take, and then he makes a small appeal on his Facebook group and people come together and are able to rally and give him what he could.

Now, imagine if this gentleman was able to maybe move – he’s a young man. So imagine if he could go to a youth group, you know, or any other self-help group – a woman’s group – and go to them and say, folks, I have identified such and such, and I want to go there and I want to support them.

Would you come along, and oh, can you give me more resources, materials, or money, so that I can do some direct cashback. Imagine if he could do that easily? And imagine if this self-help group could then say, then, well, we have so much, but the need sounds like it’s big, and what if I go to the community-based organization that’s slightly bigger than me? And they can be able to go to the community-based organizations that already have those linkages with them, and rally to, you know, around this self-help group that then, ultimately, flows it down to this Cup of Uji, and then, it flows on to the communities that need it.

Now what I’m saying is that the challenge that we are saying about anticipation and timeliness, in my view from where I’m seated, you know in this part of the world is simply addressed by actually engaging those actors that we have often overlooked.
Now every time we hear about this fantastic commitment to localization or locally led development, we get very excited. We are always waiting. I have been waiting – I’ve been working in this capacity strengthening of local actors actively since the early 2000s, and we’ve been hearing about these commitments coming through. And we’ve been getting excited about it.

Where I’m at in 2022, we acknowledge that it’s not as simple as shifting, you know, the direct grant that we saw all these amazing graphs about, it’s all about shifting those grants from the very large multilaterals and IGOs directly to us. We understand that the cost of doing this in terms of administration and compliance and due diligence, and you know, so on and so forth, would be significant for you.

We also understand that from a bilateral point of view, after talking to them, you know, like several years, you know, they hold majority of the – you know, of assisted development funds. And they are not able – they can only give a handful of grants – you know, major grants per country, and they are limited. We understand that – that they cannot directly invest in us.

Now what they have done traditionally therefore has gone on to work within this – you know, in partnership – we have these partnership models. The problem is that the partnership models are largely based in the Global North, again, and this Global North entity or intermediaries don’t always – you know, have tended then to monopolize this system. And they monopolize the system and are coming to work in these local communities without the sitting power that we need to make decisions about where, when, and who needs the help in what time.

They also do this without necessarily giving us all they money that we need. We are told how much money you need, and there’s very little flexibility to switch. If this one area is not useful, we need to switch to this other area, but that flexibility is not always there.

So what we have found is that many local actors, therefore, have decided, you know, what? If that’s what they’re looking for – you know, what are these big funders saying? They’re saying they want us to have a more wholistic approach to community issues. They're saying they want a multidisciplinary approach to how we support these organizations.

We want you to be able to scale. We want you to be able to absorb large amounts of money. As single entities, we are not able to do that.

And so what has happened is organically we have seen that local – different respondents, different types, shapes, and sizes, the whole range that I just described – from individual movements to, you know – (audio break) – self-
help groups to community-based organizations all the way to local and national organizations are now coming together. (Audio break) – can you use already – (audio break) Can you come together and join this coalition and let all of them work together?

I’m a little bit bigger. I have stronger financial systems. I can provide that. I’ve got stronger government systems, and I’ve got banks. And if we come together, why don’t we then have joint actions? Let’s coalesce around this one community that we have and see what – how we can best respond.

Now those models are there. Those models are there in terms of alternative intermediaries that are local, that are indigenous, that are very effective, and that have this very strong peer accountability mechanism that addresses some of those risks that a lot of funders often, you know, use – you know, focus on when they are shying away from working directly with local actors.

Now the recent work that I’m doing at the moment I’m in allyship with a U.S.-based IGO called The Sharetrust – just because there’s no way I’m dealing with 501(c)(3) registrations and everything that that requires in order for me – for funding to flow here, and we are working collaboratively to build local coalition accelerators.

And we enter into a three-year agreement with these coalitions – different shapes, sizes – but the idea is to have those different types of organizations or entities within this coalition and identify this community. And then, say, OK, what is the challenge that we want to address, and then, we address it directly.

Eighty percent of the funds that we raise goes directly to actions, to the coalitions’ work. Twenty percent goes into the backend support, but most importantly to do some of this advocacy work that we are saying to show you the proof that actually working directly through local actors can work.

And as I end that, I want to actually say a very big thank you to Maria. Last year, the coalition did a very rapid survey like we did, you know, about two weeks within the community. One of the coalitions we have is in Uganda, and during – due to the effects of COVID, they said, well, what are the current problems.

They did a very rapid survey through their community groups, community structures that they work through. They found out about the rise in cases of sexual abuse and gender violence, and we did a public appeal to raise some money to top off what they already had. And Humanity United came alongside us, and gave us money demonstrating to us what we say in my country – (speaks in a foreign language) – “do good and go away.”
So I – just to attest that when you speak about trust with philanthropy, we had that honor of actually experiencing that, and it did – it went a long way to supporting this particular coalition to bring the services rapidly to the communities that needed them.

So that’s just how I’ll start. Thank you.

Ms. Tesfaye:

Thank you. Thank you so much, Chilande, and great to hear the connection with Humanity. Thank you for also pushing us to think about the possibilities if we are able to achieve localization as well as some of the real obstacles.

Now, going back to the question of finance – because I think it is one of the obstacles – and turning back to you, Andrej, you kind of alluded to this untapped potential in the private sector not just for philanthropic donations, but for really long deep engagement to help countries that are in situations of fragility move out of this fragility trap.

And although there’s been a lot of excitement about this deep engagement from the private sector, we haven’t really seen that. So I was wondering if you could talk us through a little bit what the obstacles are, what continues to be some of the things that disincentivize this engagement? And you reference some initiatives you’re working on like the humanitarian resilience initiative, how is that helping us to sort of move towards greater engagements?

Mr. Kirn:

Great. Let me try and address it from both the perspective of kind of these bigger systemic challenges that we’re seeing, and then look at some of the stakeholder groups that we’re trying to engage and bring together. And I’ll share some examples as well.

And I think when we started our work a couple years ago with the launch of the initiative – of the HRI Initiative – I think at the time innovative finance was largely perceived as a way to sort of diversify the resource base. And I think it has matured over the years as that, yes, is one of the potential impacts as a way to partner with business.

But I think more so it’s also exposed a much wider discussion around this is not just about bringing the private sector into the humanitarian sector and doing so too late, where really it’s just been a financing discussion, and it activates only one part of the business community, I would say.

But it’s also about the – kind of the frank exchange needed about the kind of change that we need to see within the humanitarian – various agencies and our IGOs, donors as well as others – to work together. And I think what we
haven't seen enough in the past was that these conversations and this dialogue happens early on.

And apart from, I would say, the World Humanitarian Summit and maybe the Global Refugee Forum, there haven't been enough – many spaces where that direct dialogue has happened in a way where there was that inclusion. And I say this, again, more from the business community side.

Now on the systemic challenges when it comes to what we are trying to put forward, which is to unlock more private capital going into these difficult environments, there's a big mismatch of the pipeline. I think we actually see quite an interesting ecosystem of what we call a dry opportunity.

So these are companies that have entered more fragile contexts or operate in the fringes and try to enter but face a number of different challenges, but also entrepreneurs, various start-ups, you know, locally, regionally, as well as globally. But they're not yet quite meeting some of the key investor criteria to be able to reach scale.

And where we see this in the most acute way is that there’s actually been some really interesting movement and positive movement of donors supporting innovation through various kind of financing vehicles and channels, but very few of those are coming out with sort of a stronger business model, where they're able to then reduce their dependence on the grants and really look at other sources of financing.

The second one is really about organizations facing internal barriers. We don't discuss this enough, and one of my colleagues always thinks it's the invisible work that needs to happen.

And here we really speak about the improvement of your own readiness within an organization. It’s about capacity. It’s about incentives. It’s about leadership support.

I think the kind of leadership we saw from the ICRC as they've scaled – their new financing models work was both bottom up, but it was definitely top down in terms of making sure that that push of what was the role of the player like ICRC in working with the private sector was supported from the political side.

And then, the third one is, you know, this is certainly not the first year we're having this discussion. It's been going on for quite some time. So we see, actually, parts of the ecosystem that is very active, but is very fragmented.

And what I mean by that is there is sort of a coalescence of organizations and kind of various pools of funding that supports specific stages of
development, but there isn’t enough alignment across, and there isn’t sort of this extension of a line of sight of what’s coming from, let’s say, the humanitarian sector that may be a DFI, or a private sector would be interested at a certain stage. And that’s one of the areas we’re really focused on and trying to support those opportunities, but also connect early on.

Maybe just to highlight a couple of specific challenges and kind of the roles that we see as – amongst various stakeholders – I would say that from the various companies and entrepreneurs that we’re engaging with, you know, this access to capital is a huge issue, and in part because even with a proven concept or a proven solution or product or service they’re able to offer, often they’re still perceived as too small or even unstable in order to really attract larger scale private capital.

But there’s also a question of absorption, capacity, and the articulation of a clear ask to investors in where that type of financial support would be able to enable them to scale and to grow in different parts of their operations.

I think DFIs play a critical role. You know, our opinion is that scale will not come and should not come with humanitarian dollars, but DFI funding, combined with private sector, is really the combination that we need to see more of in order to reach scale in these environments.

But there’s, I think, a lot of challenges there on internal incentives also combined with – and these are very active discussions – on their ongoing difficulties to engage and invest in projects that deliver lower return and are perceived as higher risk.

I think investors are generally amongst those that are always most interested. We’re not saying that it’s easy to engage them, but they are most interested to understand how they can participate and how they can help.

But what they’re really missing is kind of that contextual understanding of these environments and that’s where humanitarians, you know, play a key role, both locally and globally. But I don’t want to forget to underline the importance of data, and that’s what we’ve been hearing throughout our work.

And that’s not just financial, it’s also data on the impact and the potential of that impact that such an investment can bring, and USAID is actually supporting some of this work to better understand the role of data and unlocking investments.

Foundations are key as – but we’re not seeing enough of this, I would say, to really take risk and provide seed, catalytic capital, for early ventures. You know, we had the CEO of the IKEA Foundation speak in Davos, and his main
message was they are the ones that are able to take the risk and potentially fail if necessary, but it is a way to stimulate new approaches and new partnerships.

And I would say maybe finally on the donor side what we’re seeing is there is general appetite and openness, but this agenda is in constant – and when I say this agenda in partner with other nontraditional actors – is in constant competition with the short-term needs and addressing the huge crisis.

And I think the role of leadership as well as, you know, both at the high level, but also within organizations to make sure that there is sustained space to look at some of these longer-term challenges, to collaborate with others – that that is not diminished even in the area where we see stronger crises erupt.

Maybe one or two examples just to share – just to indicate some of the movement that we’re seeing that we take as positive signs. One is coming, actually, out of the WFP’s Innovation Accelerator. It’s a hydroponics project called H2Grow.

They operate in 21 countries to essentially provide and use skillsets to provide livelihoods to vulnerable communities by making them essentially hydroponic farmers. What they’ve been now doing and where we’ve worked with them has been also about piloting a new business model in Kenya that’s more of an asset-based loan model.

And what I think what’s important here is that the way that’s being tested and designed is the WFP doesn’t necessarily have to play a role in the years to come of scaling this, but it provides a market entry point. It provides, I would say, the guardrails necessary to be able to build the foundation of a potential business opportunity that addresses the needs from the ground, but hands it over to a private operator potentially over time.

And then the second one I think we would like to see more of, but nonetheless there are examples, for example, of DFIs supporting smaller ticket sizes. The FMO is doing some very interesting work where, for example, they invested about 5 million euros in a microfinance institution in West Africa called FINEL, and they were able to do that through their MACIDI Fund that allows them to take greater risk and to invest early on. There are other examples, but maybe I’ll pause here.

Ms. Tesfaye: Thanks. Sadie, I want to turn back to you.

So Andrej talked a bit about scale and some of the challenges with scaling approaches, and going back to the example you shared about Airbnb.org, it
seems like the success of that model really depends on your ability to tap into your corporation, but also work with hosts.

And I’m wondering what are some of the constraints to this approach, particularly, you know, we see a growing number of people in need of housing because of displacement, and to what extent can this also be applied in more fragile contexts?

I think you alluded to, like, this is where partnerships come into play, so I would love to hear a bit more about these constraints, and how you go about establishing partnerships that could help you kind of address the growing needs of people that are displaced.

Ms. Bynum:

Yeah, I think I heard a little bit about trust and certainly about donor and donor intent, and that is something – so we are in, again, a unique position where we’re a nonprofit. We also rely on donors, and donors have their intent.

We’re also a funder. So we’re providing funding to organizations, and so there is sort of an inherent tension between how do we make sure we’re getting those funds or our resources in terms of access to short-term stays that are billed to Airbnb.org to the right communities – the communities that are in need.? And then, how do we also incorporate our own diversity, equity, and inclusion goals to prioritize the most underserved communities in a disaster?

And so there is, you know, some inherent challenges in that, and I think it starts with recognizing that that exists. And then being very clear about what our mission and our focus is, and making sure that we’re looking for organizations who have the trust of the local communities, those – you know, sometimes it’s a faith-based organizations. Sometimes it’s a – you know, it’s the guy, right, who’s known in that neighborhood, who knows the people who live there, who knows who are impacted.

Sometimes we struggle with people even understanding what Airbnb is, you know? What do you mean I’m going – you’re going to put me in somebody’s house? Can I see it first? What’s the address? You know, that can be a very real barrier and limitation, and so, you know, at the time of an event we’re constantly trying to address all of the things at once, and it’s definitely a challenge.

And I think that’s why it’s so important for us to have that alignment between our corporate side, our nonprofit side, our nonprofit and community-based organizations, you know, those local folks who understand what’s going on and what the needs are. And then trust that they be candid with us about what they need and what they don’t need.
You know, it’s not easy to be in a position to say, hey, thanks I really appreciate that offer of a short-term stay, but that’s not what my community needs. And so we really want to create those relationships like everyone else, you know, pre-event. It’s hard when, to your point, there’s constantly something going on. There is always a need.

And so we just try to do what it is that we can. We try to be very clear about what it is that we can offer, and we try to make sure that we’re always talking about the impact, so that our host community and our donors understand what we’re able to accomplish and encourage them to certainly support that more.

And then we’re looking to, how do we get to those other areas where there are some limitations, where there might be less properties or less hosts? You know, what is it that we can offer? And so that comes into play when we think about, what is our access to other resources that might be needed.

And for us, you know, we’re a relatively small team, and so there’s always a challenge with trying to get in touch with and reach, and connect, and build relationships with the right people at the right times. And it’s just a matter of continuing to be clear about this is where we want to go, and we’re going to be very laser-focused about getting there.

And we have the benefit – this is one of the things that’s great about working with a top organization is that innovation is sort of the bedrock and foundation, and they’ll be on it. They are really supportive in allowing us to be as aggressive as possible to making sure that we’re providing the right kind of aid, and we have to be mindful of that balance of being respectful and considering the agency for what the community wants.

It can't just be that we come in from on high and be like, here, we have this. That doesn’t work, all right. It’s got to be like we’re here, what can we do, how can we partner with you, what can we – you know, how can we assist, and how do we not get in their way when they're also responding? They’re also delivering their own aid. They’re also going through a process of vetting and issuing the relief that they offer.

And so it’s challenging, and it can be done, but it starts with – and at least for us because we’re founder-led our founders believe in this community and creating community on a global scale and leveraging the resources – it starts with having that backing. And it’s an important part of the foundation of our organization, so it allows us on the org side to have the freedom to get out there and hit it.
Ms. Tesfaye: Thank you. We are running a little low on time, but I do want to get in a couple more questions before we open it up to the audience.

So Chilande, turning back to you, in your opinion what does it take to create equitable partnerships between local stakeholders and external stakeholders? Whether it’s the private sector, institutional donors – you can think of others – what does equity look like when you have these inherent differentials in power?

And can you give us advice, for those of us who are coming in as external actors, as to how to really intentionally build partnerships that are equitable?

Chilande, you’re on mute. Chilande, we can’t hear you. You’re on mute.

Ms. Kuloba-Warria: Oh my goodness. I had gone on and on. Sorry.

Yeah, I think it sounds like a very simple idea, but it actually has got lots of nuances to it. My experience building this equitable partnership goes beyond that direct relationship that you’re having with the organization and acknowledging everything that comes with the entities of the parties involved.

It requires us to acknowledge all the history of where we come from and to where we are at at the moment, and then it builds this relationship that is for me three critical things. It is that it recognizes the power – the inherent and very overt powers that both entities have got because we – honestly, we keep talking about shifting power like we want to make one party powerless, but really that doesn’t work. We need to bring both our paths together and make this huge bomb that – for the greater good.

And so we are – what I’m saying is that we need to come up and relate in ways that allow each one of us to – a person must recognize that no one is better than the other. No one’s idea is better than the other.

You may have resources, but I have resources in terms of the knowledge, in terms of the local networks, in terms of everything that is going to make you more effective and efficient in doing what it is you set out to do.

So we need to be able to actually make sure that all parties are involved in three critical things. One in crafting division.

Now the idea of consortiums in the past, putting together a proposal and coming back and then riling us together and saying, you know, organization X, Y, and Z, you will do this, that, and the other – that does not constitute a
shared vision, and then making us believe in your vision, that’s not – does not constitute that.

So the co-creation approaches that I’m seeing now is a step in the right direction. We need – the second piece is that, therefore, we need also that collaboration when it comes to designing the programs. What needs to happen when, where, how, how long is it going to take, who are the key actors?

So that whole idea around making decisions together needs to happen for it to be actually equitable because that’s another area where we feel powerless. I mean, the five most critical thing that always breaks the back is money, right. It’s always money that comes with everything else, right.

So we need to have equal say in how this money’s distributed. How much money are we getting? Do we have visibility of how much moneys in there in our kitty? How are we distributing it?

Are we at the table? Are we having those conversations to – that will help us unpack all of that? Now if those three critical elements are there, then, you know, we can move forward. Now this is not to say that the problem is only with those that are coming in with claims or votes. It’s not only about the foreigners.

We also have our own issues as local actors that – that come to play because we are coming from a history where, you know, there’s a whole spectrum of how we collaborate. We’ve come from highly individualistic, low-trust zone, where we were in high competition with one another or we just settled down to coexist with one another because we just have to, and then we moved into this highly competitive mindset, where we now say, OK, I want to know what so and so is doing or I want to learn. So we started exchanging information, cooperating, and coordinating with one another to protect our tasks or to learn from one another.

And we’re now moving more and more into realizing that we now need to take advantage of each other’s proximities, to powers, to money, to communities. And so we are seeing more collaborations and integrations happening.

Now those who are coming from the outside, you need to take time to learn and understand who are these people that you want to engage in partnership with. What I will say is that for the large donors who have a lot of power, you have a critical role in helping us to build some of these partnerships.
I think continuing to reform your funding systems because they have played a role in creating this dynamic that I’ve just described, but also invest in key structures, in systems outside of the organization.

It’s OK to build the capacity of the institution, but if you don’t play a part in helping the ecosystem, then move out of the institution and go and start to deal with – and help for local government structures or, you know, have to struggle with some of the local private sector actors that are also in the same space.

So do what you can to also invest in that, and absolutely, absolutely find collaborators that you have seen are actually doing a fantastic job. And as you’re doing all of that in all of these amazing spaces where you’re at, where you’re trying to shift your systems, where you’re trying to actually figure out how you shift power, call us up to the table. Call us to the table. We know.

We have ideas. We have thoughts. We have experienced all of this. If you’re in tables, where you’re making these critical decisions as much as possible, create allyship with folks as much as possible in the Global South.

If you’re at a table and you see we are not represented, pull up a chair and call us. We are always more than willing to help input into helping too because this is not just our problem or just your problem, it’s our problem. So that’s what I would say in terms of how we move forward to build that equitable partnership.

Ms. Tesfaye: Thank you so much, Chilande. And then, the last question to you, Maria.

Ms. Jurua-Kisumbi: Thank you. Actually, my sister has very much explained. What accompaniment really means is, this is our problem – not you sitting here in D.C. come up with solution you find, and then you go into a country and tell them, OK, this is what you want you to do and this is how you want to do it.

So accompaniment, I will say, is really a shift from the traditional way of how we as funders, as we within philanthropy, are engaging in these areas. It’s more about walking alongside each other. When my sister was talking about Uji, I go I felt homesick; I want porridge. Here you call it grits. So I was actually very – I want some porridge.
It also made me think about our partners put in South Sudan who have a program around taking tea together and using taking tea together to be able to identify the issues that are affecting them and coming up with solutions.

And also accompaniment is – let me not even make it – it’s not a bad word. Let me tell you what it really is. It more is we recognize the power that we come in. And she has nicely said that power that we have. How do we use the power to be able to advance the needs of our partners on the ground?

Like for us at Humanity United, we are very close to U.S. government, so we do a lot of advocacy to ensure that our partners’ issues are being integrated in their planning and assuring that our partners are getting the necessary resources and funding.

And also, accompaniment is, it’s OK for you – for the partner to tell you, hey, step back. If you come alongside me, you bring trouble. You bring – in Nigeria they say, wahala. You’re just troublemaker. Just stay back and just give us the funding, and trust us to be able to do this work.

That’s what accompaniment. Are you stepping back? What role is it that you play? And it’s also not stuck in stone. It’s a continuous living tool that we keep on changing, and adapting, and ensuring that we are able to respond appropriately, and when necessary.

And one thing, which is very, very clear, COVID-19 showed us that we’re actually flexible. You know, I remember when they told us you guys are going to work from home. The first thing we all did within the organization – reached out to our partners.

How are you all doing? What resources are needed? What changes need to be done? And we quickly – which was surprising because normally to shift from a project to general operating there’s so many processes.

But let me tell you, the way it was done so quick showed us that it’s actually possible, and we were able to – some of the issues they had was it was very difficult to transition from being in space to online. What resources that we need to provide for them. So it’s really like playing a lot of active listening, active conversation, and deep relationship, and having more long-term connection and partnership with these partners so that you can be able to co-create.

Lastly, I’ll just say it’s really a shift of how we show up and more bring the people. Because a lot of times you sit here it’s pepper, budgets, this, but accompaniment is a reminder of ubuntu, which is who we are as people when we engage in these humanitarian situations.
Thank you.

Ms. Tesfaye: Thank you. I think an excellent way of describing it, and thank you for showing it’s a lot of sort of listening and being nimble to the situation.

So we don’t have much time, but we do have about 10 minutes for questions either from the audience here or online. There is a microphone that you have in the audience if you’d like to pose a question, and I will be checking to see if there’s been anything online.

Q: Hi, my name is Alexis Schmid. I’m from Boston Children’s Hospital, Harvard University. And thank you for your time today.

And what we do as part of our Children in Crisis Program is we work with local partners to implement locally driven solutions, as well as to do the monitoring and evaluation, to highlight the impact of that really profound programming.

And one thing that we do as academic partner, as I said, is to, like, amplify and elucidate the impact of the work so often – as Juliet mentioned earlier – it’s number of patients in clinic versus the impact of the health outcomes. What role do you see academic partners to do that accompaniment, as you mentioned, to really amplify the work that’s being done?

Ms. Jurua-Kisumbi: Should I answer that?

Ms. Tesfaye: Yes, anyone who would like to respond from the panel. Actually, let’s take two questions at a time.

Q: Hi. Thank you. Alice Obrecht from ALNAP. I had a question for the colleagues who are working, you know, on the ground with partners.

We saw – you mentioned the importance of accompaniment and the opportunities for that that you saw in COVID-19. I was wondering how much you’ve been seeing communities themselves really picking up those leadership roles.

We saw a lot of communities actually going in and delivering aid projects or facilitating that themselves in COVID-19, particularly in camp settings. I was wondering how much of that you’ve seen and if that’s going to stick around?

And then just on the private sector to Andrej’s points, you know, we see this a lot in our research as well – that this kind of call for more private sector
engagement really hasn’t materialized, and I was wondering more around the incentives for that, and if – the fact that we have – and I’m, of course, biased on this because I’m a researcher – but the fact that we have real struggles with getting good solid impact data is a deterrent to that for private sector partners?

I think it was interesting to see the ICRC experimenting with impact bonds and really struggling, actually, to get the kinds of data on outcomes that private sector investors are used to seeing in their sectors. So how much of that is a barrier to getting more private sector funding and engagement?

Thank you.

Ms. Tesfaye: Do you want to respond, Maria?

Ms. Jurua-Kisumbi: Yes, the one with how do you engage academia within accompaniment, I look at – if academia – who are the local universities you are working with on the ground, and how are you co-creating with those universities? I think a lot of times academia – it’s like the Western academia who do this kind of research and ignore academia on the ground.

I come from a great university called Makerere University based in Kampala, and I’m like those are the partners academia should be engaging – these local universities who actually have closer connection to the communities. So that’s one area.

And then the other is, I’ll give you an example. The past year we worked very closely with co-creators we call local peace builders from across the globe – I think 25 countries. They were really, really fascinated that we were giving them the space to identify the solutions, to identify what to do. We gave them the resources and said, OK, what are the needs, what is it that needs to be done?

So I think with funders moving towards a direction, people are coming up, and you very nicely had my sister from Kenya talk about how we’re showing up and engaging and taking up leadership on this. Because when all the IGOS left, all the humanitarian agencies leave, it’s the local actors who take up these issues and take up how to respond and use their networks, the culture to be able to respond to a lot of those situations. So we have to give them the space. It’s OK. Step back. Trust them to be able to do it.

Ms. Tesfaye: Maybe – I just – after that, actually – sorry – I was going to say at Mercy Corps, the organization I worked for, we also engaged a lot with academic institutions through partnerships for doing impact evaluations, randomized controlled trials, things of that nature, and we’ve really seen the utility and
the fruits of this type of investment and evidence because it’s really important for the donor community, for local communities. Everybody wants to know, what is the actual impact of the work we’re doing? Are the investments actually achieving their goals? So just wanted to make that plug for Mercy Corps as well.

Ms. Bynum: Yeah, I think you mentioned whether or not we expect to see that sort of ground swell of communities being there for each other to continue, and I would say yes. You know, one of the really cool things that happened in the Ukraine response were that people started to book properties listed on Airbnb with no intent of saying there, just specifically to get funding directly to folks who were in Ukraine.

And so, you know, our host community is amazing and creative and spontaneous, and so, you know, to your point, you know, do good and get out of the way, that’s what we did there, right. We let them lead that, and we still tried to supplement with the very strategic housing of folks working through organizations who are also able to provide wrap-around services to those displaced. But I think it’s part of our job to get out of the way when it’s necessary.

And I think – relating to academia, I think that’s one of the things everybody struggles with is trying to get that impact across beyond the numbers, right, that they’re always looking at. And I think that, for us, it starts with trying to recognize that we need to define impact differently.

We need to be the leaders in sort of letting people know that it’s not just about those numbers. It is about the stories of the communities that are brought along and the individual households that are brought along.

And that work that we’re doing so that when we’re very targeted about reaching organizations, particularly community-based organizations who don’t historically get funding, that we see that goes to the larger NGOs, and why that makes a difference.

And so we’re a young organization. It’s going to take some time for us to be able to build that history, that length of time to show the impact over time, but it starts at least, you know, trying to get people to understand it is more about the numbers. And we hope that we can be successful in that.

Ms. Tesfaye: Thank you, Sadie.

Andrej, do you want to respond to the second question?
Mr. Kirn: Yeah, it’s interesting to hear about the ICRC’s Humanitarian Impact Bond. My understanding has always been that the reason why they chose that model for their physical rehabilitation work was because of ICRC’s work over the years – if not decades – and the data that they had to essentially reinforce about the potential of the impact for bringing in both donors and investors to support that.

But for sure it remains a big issue, and when I say I think there’s kind of two components to it, one is the broader accessibility of kind of market data, and the understanding of, let’s say, if we take teams within the humanitarian sector that are looking to deploy new and innovative financing models, to leverage that data as a way to project of the potential of a market, right. It’s not just the potential of the impact of a project or a specific community, but after that, what’s the growth potential?

And it’s a little bit about how best to leverage that, and I think so far in terms of the sectors where that’s been most prevalent and kind of where there’s been multiple areas of effort has been in the energy side, especially in terms of starting to green humanitarian operations but then there’s a much broader discussion about energy access, both to displaced and host communities.

I think the second one is a lack of understanding and dialogue on what type of data investors would need in order to make an informed decision about that being an investable opportunity. And that’s part of that work that I briefly mentioned that USAID is supporting that Dow-Burke IRC and CrossBoundary are currently leaning on, which is essentially stress testing the types of data that would be necessary for an investor to be either reassured or to better understand about the potential.

So I would say there’s a discussion around broader potential of new markets, but then there’s also the gathering and the use of different types of data that speaks to different types of investors depending on what they need.

And maybe, finally, just to say there’s some interesting work also being done in that respect by direct energy and investment network and Acumen in East Africa.

Ms. Tesfaye: Thank you so much. I know there’s one last question, but unfortunately, we are out of time. So I would encourage you to find a panelist if you would like to pose a question to them after this, which is going to be our lunch break. Could you please join me in a round of applause for the panelists. (Applause.)
So this was a really great discussion, and I hope everybody will join for the afternoon sessions, where we’ll have the ability to dig more deeply in more region-specific panels.

Very importantly, I want to give you some guidance on how we will be having lunch. So we’ll be serving lunch in the reception area, and then, after lunch our first set of breakout panels will begin promptly at 12:30.

The Aiding Afghanistan Under Taliban Control Panel, which is moderated by Katherine Bliss, will be in Room 2C, and please note that the capacity for this room is 35 people and seats will be taken on a first come, first serve basis.

The second panel, Humanitarian Assistance Amidst Great Power Competition in Syria, moderated by Dr. Jon Alterman, will take place in Room 2AB.

So thank you very much and enjoy your lunch.

(END)