



First Quarterly Report 2019 (January – March)

Introduction

The 3rd meeting of the Governing Bodies (Advisory Board and Scientific Committee) of the Humanitarian Encyclopedia (HE) project took place in November and set the scene for 2019. The conclusions of the meetings include:

- The primary users of the HE will be humanitarian actors.
- English will be used as the first language to develop the HE, taking note that an agreed “stated ambition” is to make the HE available in the six languages of the United Nations.
- The selection of humanitarian concepts to be included in the HE was completed. The final list includes 129 concepts. 20 concepts were prioritized by governing bodies for analysis in 2019.
- The HE will not provide one single definition per concept. Although there may be exceptions for concepts that already have a universally agreed definition. The analysis of convergent and divergent uses of each concept should facilitate better understanding. Debates around a concept should be highlighted.
- The HE online platform will be tested early on by the governing bodies towards the end of 2019 and will be progressively populated with other humanitarian concepts.

It is worth-noting that [the Global Compacts on Refugees](#) (GCR) and [the Global Compact for Safe, Regular, and Orderly Migration](#) (GCM), adopted in December 2018 by the United Nations General Assembly, both urge the support from the academic sector for their implementation. Many key words mentioned in the two Global Compacts require cross-sectoral understanding for cooperation. For example, humanitarian concepts prioritized by the HE governing bodies, such as “Resilience”, “Participation”, “Protection”, “Community”, “Security”, “Quality”, and “Development” are repeatedly mentioned in both compacts. The word “Protection” appears 44 times in Global Compact for Refugees. The HE, by explaining such concepts, can potentially contribute to better understanding, and effective implementation, of these international agreements.



Photo caption: Members of the Advisory Board, the Scientific Committee, and the HE team

Progress on Platform Development

After assessing the needs of humanitarian practitioners with regards to the platform in 2018, the HE team conducted qualitative semi directed interviews with some members of the Scientific Committee, interacted with UNIGE (University of Geneva) and DiSTIC (Strategic branch of the university concerning digital product development). The main deliverable is an MVP (Minimum Value Proposition), a technical document that is a critical requisite to conduct a public bid.

This MVP does not include, as initially planned a collaborative working space as the assessment indicated that academics rely on their own tools (based on their specific disciplines) and consequently a “one size fits all” strategy would not apply. Instead existing tools, such as google docs, will be proposed. The focus of the MVP is on dissemination of knowledge and participatory tools.

The public procurement process will take from March to June, from elaboration, to publication, to validation. The HE team will be advised on this process by the procurement department of the UNIGE together with the DiSTIC.

First development stages should occur in September, with an alpha phase to test functional specifications. The Scientific Committee and Advisory Board will be invited to contribute to the beta phase towards end of the year. This phase will see the testing of the interface design, the integration of data visualisation tools, and the contents of the first conceptual entries. Adopting an agile development methodology will allow testing and feedback at each release. In early 2020 there will be a more elaborated “release version” with new functionalities to be tested during a couple of months, before making the HE public during the Summer of 2020.

Humanitarian Encyclopedia workshop, Mexico City

The first workshop in the Latin America region took place on 19 February in Mexico City with 21 participants. It was hosted by OCHA, the Instituto Mora, and CERAH. The UNDP Resident Coordinator, Mr Antonio Molpeceres and the National Coordinator of the Mexican Civilian Protection, Mr David Leon, introduced the discussion. Compared to other workshops, there was a predominance of participants from governmental or government-supported institutions.



Photo caption: Group discussion during the workshop in Mexico City

The results of concept groupings in two main categories - development and humanitarian action, were quite distinct from other workshops and seem to be emblematic of the situation in Mexico and Central America. Disaster response is not perceived as humanitarian, but as a responsibility of the government (civil protection); disaster risk reduction is closely linked to development; humanitarian action is focused on refugees and displaced people, with migration being a central issue. Violence is omnipresent, pervasive in society, but not necessarily linked to a humanitarian response.

As participants were all fluent in English, the fact that the Humanitarian Encyclopedia would be developed in English was not noted as an issue. But participants insisted on the importance of giving due attention to terms specific to the Latin American context including:

Natural Disasters
Interoperability

This concept is still used in English, but not accepted any more in Latin America

A concept with origins in the Caribbean that looks to integrate or add efforts into their local operability. In some regions, the concept is understood differently.

Unconventional violence
Human rights

Refers to the violence that is not considered in International conventions

This concept is considered as central to humanitarianism.

Forced displacement

The concept is considered in Chiapas legislation, but in northern México, people in this situation are not protected.

Research

The main focus in the past three months has been on enlarging the corpus of documents for the linguistic analysis, finalising the humanitarian organisations database for release by mid-2019, and drawing on additional linguistic expertise to complement the work by Aurélie Picton.

A joint meeting with Prof Julien Velcin, Université Lyon 2, and Dr Selja Seppala, University College Cork, Ireland on 19th March allowed to discuss different linguistic approaches to analysing a domain specific language and how these approaches could be usefully combined. The next meeting on 4 June will explore avenues for collaboration more concretely based on some preliminary work.

Ms Tessa Paci Innocenti, a linguistic scholar working under the supervision of Prof Aurélie Picton, is constituting the larger corpus together with the project team, namely Joy Muller and Gabriel Serex. At this stage the focus is on including more documents from humanitarian organisations. The database of \approx 2,500 humanitarian organisations serves to identify documents in the following way:

- Organisational strategies available in English are already included and will be completed (from 2005 onwards, new strategies).
- Websites of each organisation will be scanned for activity/annual reports. If available, reports will be included from 2005 onwards. (N.B. 2,600 annual reports are already identified)
- A note will be made about other materials available online, in particular evaluations, training documents and guidelines. In a second step these documents can then be included.

General documents already included in the corpus are being completed with recent editions.

Currently two journals (all issues since 2005) - Review of Red Cross (legal bias)
Humanitarian on the Move (Groupe URD) and - Disasters
Humanitarian Exchange Magazine (ODI-HPN) are - Journal Humanitarian Logistics (logistics bias)
already included in the « General document » corpus. - Springer Journal International Humanitarian Action
In a next step the inclusion of more journals needs to (very recent)
be decided, such as those listed opposite. - Journal of Humanitarian Affairs (in preparation)
- Reviews by EvidenceAid (relative health bias)
- Conflict and Health (only health-related)

A note on corpus constitution is available.

This is all work in “silent” progress leading up to the production of the first entries later this year. Several SC members have committed to authoring concept analyses. A guideline for authors is being drafted.

The Humanitarian Encyclopedia at international fora

CERAH participated in several events to raise the awareness of the HE and reach out to interested parties.

The Geneva Triologue (Campus Biotech, Geneva, 21 January)

The second edition of the Geneva Triologue was organized by the University of Geneva in collaboration with UNITAR, and XuetangX, China's largest MOOC platform. The event gathered thought leaders, education innovators and decision makers from educational institutions, international organizations, and the private sector to explore ways to collaborate to scale up the education on SDGs. Its goal, in the spirit of SDG 17, was to inspire new partnerships for learning of SDGs and then scaling up its implementation in relevant sectors. It allowed us to explore the role that the Humanitarian Encyclopedia can play to bridge humanitarian and development sectors through an oral and poster presentation and participation in the workshop "Scientific diplomacy, policy, and SDGs". This resulted in the inclusion of the Humanitarian Encyclopedia in the workshop recommendations.

Humanitarian Networks & Partnerships Week (CICG, Geneva, 4-8 February)

During the Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week (HNPW), CERAH organised a briefing session and an Inter-Network session.



Photo caption: Briefing session during HNPW

Both events were attended by participants from various sectors, including military and civil-defence actors. During discussions, the divergent views on concepts were highlighted and the impact this will have on the effectiveness of operations illustrated. It showed that buzzwords are used by all, their definitions being unclear to users.

Launch of the Research Network on Humanitarian Efforts (Oslo, 7 March)

Prof Doris Schopper was invited to deliver the keynote speech "Unravelling humanitarian concepts - From divergent meanings to a common understanding?" at the inaugural meeting of the Research Network on Humanitarian Efforts, a joint initiative of three Norwegian research institutions, funded by the Norwegian government. The presentation raised much interest and led to a lively discussion with the audience on the Humanitarian Encyclopedia and in particular the research approach. One participant wrote a blog "Do you speak humanitarian" which very nicely summarizes the issues discussed.

<https://www.simonreidhenry.com/blog/2019/3/7/rebooting-research-on-humanitarianism>



Photo caption: The Humanitarian Encyclopedia in Oslo

New communication materials

- A 4-pager has been published with the 129 selected concepts to promote the awareness of the Humanitarian Encyclopedia and its objectives.
- A 2-pager has been published to demonstrate how greater knowledge and understanding can support the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and its associated Sustainable Development Goals.