NGO VOICE

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From the VOICE Secretariat

As the security situation and the lack of respect for International Humanitarian Law in countries such as Afghanistan or DRC deteriorates, the diminishing of humanitarian space and the reduced access to beneficiaries has become an increasing concern for the humanitarian community. Delivering humanitarian aid is becoming more and more dangerous as shown by the dramatic increase in the frequency of attacks against aid workers over the past few years. Opinions differ on the precise causes of increasing insecurity for aid workers, but political targeting by local belligerents suggests that it matters how aid workers are perceived. When local populations or warring parties perceive ties between any military/combatants and neutral aid workers, the latter are put at risk. Economic motives have also been repeatedly put forward as plausible causes of attacks on aid workers.

Have the challenges NGOs are faced with changed? Ranging from acceptance by local populations to armed guards, what are the different alternatives for NGOs concerning security management? How to define an 'acceptable' level of risk for ourselves and our local partners? Should humanitarians develop a stronger communication strategy for making their specific mandate better known and distinguishing it clearly from political and military agendas?

Data collected and analysed by the Overseas Development Institute present up to date indicators of recent trends, and give first propositions to explain these multiple questions. In addition, in this issue of the VOICE OUT LOUD, VOICE members give their views from the field and their daily work; both on the current difficult security context they operate in, and on how they respond to it to continue to deliver quality aid to people in need of assistance.

VOICE OUT LOUD is intended to contribute to the understanding of the professional reality of humanitarian NGOs. It is addressed to the European decision makers and other stakeholders of the humanitarian community, while giving an insight into relevant humanitarian issues, relying upon the experience and input of VOICE members.

VOICE   **VOICE stands for Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies. It is a network representing 84 European non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in humanitarian aid worldwide. Seeking to involve its members in information, training, advocacy and lobbying, VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor with the European Union on emergency aid, relief, rehabilitation and disaster preparedness. As a European network, it represents and promotes the values and specificities of humanitarian NGOs, in collaboration with other humanitarian actors. Based in Brussels, VOICE has been active since 1993 and is an independent organisation under Belgian law since 2001.**

NGO VOICE

HUMANITARIAN AID WORKERS IN DANGER: THE NEED TO REAFFIRM THE PRINCIPLES

EDITORIAL

Reports of humanitarian aid workers being abducted, injured or killed during their mission in one of the ongoing armed conflicts, are no longer exceptional. It is paradoxical that the people engaged in life saving activities increasingly risk their own lives. The assumption that humanitarian workers are protected by international humanitarian law as long as they act impartially is obviously much too optimistic. Simplistic explanations such as a general anti-western attitude of the populations or part of it in the countries of intervention, or terrorism might obscure the phenomenon rather than contributing to a well grounded analysis. And this is what is needed.

The available statistics show that the overall security of endangered populations in complex emergencies and of aid workers coming to their rescue is deteriorating. They also reveal some interesting disparities between the different types of agencies targeted. NGOs are clearly the most endangered group. The number of NGO personnel attacked has systematically increased between 2003 and 2008, and the systematic upward trend applies primarily to the national staff. In general, UN personnel have also become more and more the target of violent attacks since 2004. Data indicate that the personnel of the ICRC in the field, however, seem to run much less risks.

The data reveal as well that - unsurprisingly - the countries where the risks are highest are Sudan, Afghanistan and Somalia with the highest incidents of major violence between 2006 and 2008, followed by Sri Lanka, Chad, Iraq and Pakistan. These countries will probably remain the most dangerous ones in the foreseeable future. Finally, a risk that has become more and more prevalent over the past years is that of being kidnapped. This is an indicator of the criminal energy released during conflicts in fragile or failed states: kidnappings have obviously become an attractive source of revenue.

This grim summary raises three separate but interrelated issues. First, how reliable and valid is the database available to assess the risks? Second, how to explain them and third, how to reduce them?

The data published by the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) are highly relevant. Yet the time series collected are still far from complete both with respect to the time frame and the indicators. In order to understand why humanitarian aid workers become more and more targets of violence, additional information is absolutely required.

Data collection is a necessary condition for the explanation of the different types of incidents. At this point one can only speculate about the causes. The anti-Western motive does not seem to be very plausible. The fact that the ICRC is less and less targeted seems to support this proposition. That the proportion of incidental and economically motivated violent acts is increasing shows that political motives seem to become less relevant. Thus, the terrorism argument becomes more questionable. In contrast, in fragile or failed states the emergence of organized crime seems to be prevalent and more frequent; and one may wonder whether economic motives are increasingly becoming an end in itself.

How then, to explain that the ICRC personnel runs the lowest risks? This is puzzling as this organization is at the forefront in all armed conflicts and complex emergencies. One proposition could be that this organization is very strict in applying the humanitarian principles (neutrality, impartiality and independence). Only a comparison with the incidents involving the NGOs could show whether those with a larger mandate (including peace building etc.) or closer to the military are more endangered than those who strictly adhere to the Red Cross Red Crescent Code of Conduct. What can be done to reduce the incidence of violence? First of all one would need to know more about the groups engaged in violence themselves. Are the motives the same in different countries? Crucial is how humanitarian organizations are perceived in the field.

In any event, as long as we do not have any satisfactory explanations it is hard to develop a sound preventive strategy. The trends reported have contributed to the creation of a number of security initiatives with or without governmental support. Yet any security activism is problematic as the build-up of security measures could produce the reverse effect: namely decreasing security. Finally, until on the military and political side no clear distinction with aid activities is respected (i.e. UN integrated missions), the humanitarian aid workers tend to be identified as a party to the ongoing conflicts and thus exposed to risks that could otherwise possibly be avoided.

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THE CHALLENGES OF PROVIDING AID IN INSECURE ENVIRONMENTS

THE ISSUE - HUMANITARIAN AID AND SECURITY

'(…) attacks against both national and international staff have increased dramatically (…)'

For people who work in war-zones, the risk of death or serious injury is real and ever present. In recent years however, as data collected between 1997 and 2008 for a joint ODI / CIC research project[1] shows, aid workers have themselves increasingly become targets. For most of the period under review, the data shows a steady rise in security incidents as the numbers of aid workers in the field grew, with an increasing proportion of those attacks against national staff. However, in the past three years, attacks against both national and international staff have increased dramatically.

In 2008, 260 aid workers were kidnapped, killed, or seriously injured in violent attacks, making it the deadliest in the preceding twelve years that data was gathered. 122 aid workers were killed - an increase of 50% from the previous year. Kidnappings continued to remain prevalent following a sharp upswing of incidences since 2006. The average number of incidents for each of the past three years (127) represented an 89% increase from the prior three-year period, 2003-2005, and a 177% increase from the annual average going back to 1997.

Long-term trends continue to show that national (locally hired) staff suffer increasing rates of attack relative to their numbers in the field. Over the past three years, however, attacks against international (expatriate) staff have risen dramatically in the most dangerous field setting, driven in part by an increase in politically motivated violence.

In addition to capturing the types and frequencies of incidents of violence against aid workers, the research has explored the implications of this changing security environment on aid agencies, and how they have responded to these conditions. The research has also explored the impacts of these attacks on the delivery of humanitarian assistance in highly insecure environments.

The changing nature of the security context has forced aid agencies to re-assess their processes and patterns of engagement in highly insecure environments. Three-quarters of all aid worker attacks over the past three years have taken place in just six countries - Sudan, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Chad, Iraq, and Pakistan. Closer inspection of the data finds that a massive upsurge in violent incidents in the past three years in three countries - Afghanistan, Somalia, and Sudan (Darfur) - has accounted for over 60% of all violent incidents and aid worker victims in 2008.

In these three countries, aid workers have found themselves working in ungoverned territory where attacks have been perpetrated with impunity. To attackers in these regions, targeting aid organisations can gain them valuable economic resources, remove a perceived threat to control over a local area, and/or make a potent political statement.

These contexts notwithstanding, data suggests that across the rest of the world, the rate of major attacks on humanitarians is *decreasing*. Between 2006-2008, when excluding Afghanistan, Darfur, and Somalia attacks, there were on average 2.4 aid worker victims per 10,000, down from 2.7 in the previous three year period.

The means and tactics by which aid workers are targeted are themselves cause for concern. In the last three years, kidnappings of aid workers have increased by a staggering 350%. Kidnappers tend to favour international staff over nationals, as they are more valuable in terms of ransom, and make more visible political statements. In some cases in Afghanistan, there has been documented collusion between certain political groups/militias and criminal elements to perpetrate kidnappings in order to advance political agendas.

In 45% of recorded incidents, the motive for attacks on aid workers has been identified as either political (perceived association or direct targeting of a particular agency), economic (forcefully appropriating resources or assets), or incidental (wrong place at the wrong time). Worryingly, in 2008, over 57% of cases with motives identified were found to be political - up from about 28% in 2003. Aid workers and institutions have been targeted not only because they have been associated with other Western actors perceived to be the 'enemy', but also because of the work and advocacy activities of the organisation itself. In effect, aid organisations are attacked not just because of perceptions of cooperation, but because they are themselves viewed as active partners of a Western agenda.

As a result of these experiences, aid agencies have been grappling with a series of challenges about operational security. One of the most pervasive has been to develop a more robust institutional understanding of the conditions, threats, and scenarios that aid workers routinely face. Agencies have responded by significantly increasing their internal capacity - by establishing more security posts at HQ, developing security policies and procedures, and providing more and better training to front-line national and expatriate staff.

One challenge that aid agencies have faced is how to translate risk-management methodologies

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and tools into field-level programmatic decisions. Although the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) has developed a programme-led approach to risk management, the Security Risk Assessment (SRA) model has faced a number of setbacks, and has not been implemented across the UN system. Evidence from the research has also suggested that despite the development of risk assessment methodologies like the SRA, and the fact that organisations have undertaken independent assessments, it remains unclear whether these are considered serious decision-making tools within organisations.

A significant problem facing decision makers has been the lack of adequate, appropriate, and in-depth data. This is largely because agencies - particularly small and medium-sized organisations - have not developed consistent means of tracking and analysing incidents. In particular, there is no fully-functioning single mechanism in the UN for tracking, reporting, and analysing incidents affecting the UN family and partner agencies. As a result, data and analysis of security incidents continues to be generated anecdotally, rather than being captured through a more standardised, centralised approach.

This lack of data highlights another challenge - the poor degree of inter-agency security coordination. Although aid agencies have resisted openly associating with each other so as to not compromise perceptions of independence, the benefits of cooperation have proven to outweigh those of operating alone. Examples like the Afghanistan NGO Security Office (ANSO), the NGO Safety Preparedness and Support Project in Somalia (SOAS) and the Gaza NGO Security Office (GANSO) have all proven successful. In other highly insecure environments however, this degree of collaboration has simply not been achieved.

These challenges have created numerous difficulties for how aid agencies have traditionally operated within crisis situations. For instance, many aid actors, particularly NGOs, have believed that acceptance - cultivating relations with local actors and communities - is an essential approach to security. However, experience from the most insecure environments suggests that this approach alone is not enough. Where lawlessness and banditry are pervasive, where potential attackers are pursuing wider geopolitical agendas, aid workers have lacked both the ability and the interlocutors to engage in dialogue with would-be attackers.

If agencies have chosen to scale back programming, or explore harder protection

options, this has undoubtedly complicated efforts to build local acceptance. For instance, nearly all of the aid agencies operating in Afghanistan - with the exception of the ICRC - have faced an escalation in attacks on their staff. This has made it increasingly difficult to cultivate local acceptance and create the space to operate.

Another strategy increasingly in use is that of remote management - expatriate staff are withdrawn and national staff and local partners take over operational responsibility of providing aid. However, as the data has shown, this transfers the burden of risk onto national staff, who often have fewer resources and less training. For example, after a year of remote management in Somalia, threats against one agency's national staff had increased as these individuals became identified as the decision-makers and resource handlers.

Not surprisingly, as security situations have worsened, aid operations have been scaled back or withdrawn. Of the 380 incidents recorded between 2006-2008, 82 resulted in suspension, withdrawal or relocation, in 15 countries. Each year saw a near doubling of the previous number of programme suspensions due to insecurity.

Despite the innovations and reforms in operational procedures, the age-old conundrum remains: agencies must either withdraw essential aid from needy populations, or be prepared to accept intolerable risks to the lives of their staff and partners.

The research concludes that while it remains imperative that humanitarian aid organisations strive to maintain policy and operational independence and project neutrality, agencies need to be realistic about the degree of security this stance will provide in volatile contexts like Afghanistan and Somalia.

There continues to be a need to collaborate on the collation of incidents, analysis, and assessment. Agencies need to become better at identifying when the aid community has become a wholesale political target. Moreover, agencies need to develop better comprehensive, contextual, and realistic acceptance strategies, and not let the experience of highly insecure environments dictate their engagement in other aid settings.

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THE CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF INGOS: A CHALLENGE FOR SECURITY

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'(…) increasingly negative view of INGOs held by significant segments of society and political authorities (…)'

As a result of various accusations and threats by government authorities and armed groups, INGOs are finding it increasingly difficult to operate in parts of the world where there is enormous humanitarian need. In some places they have been accused of complicity in attacks on belligerents, intelligence-gathering, and other "inappropriate" behaviour. Although these accusations are generally unfounded and politically motivated, they nevertheless reflect and reinforce an increasingly negative view of INGOs held by significant segments of society and political authorities in many of the places where they operate. INGOs cannot ignore a phenomenon that has consequences for the security of INGO operations and staff. Rejection is the breeding ground for hostile actions.

INGOS ARE INCREASINGLY PERCEIVED AS INSTRUMENTS OF FOREIGN INTERESTS

Aid organisations are often accused of serving larger political strategies, or of being the bridgehead of foreign interests. Since the '90s but more often since 2001 and the launch of the Global War on Terror (GWOT), NGOs have been sometimes implicated in the unholy alliance between development and counter-terrorism - upholding the view that poverty is a contributing cause of terrorism. Some states are now supporting their military actions with aid campaigns aimed not only at protecting their troops but also contributing to stabilization strategies.

More generally, with the evolution of the international environment towards a new multi-polar order and the diminishing influence of the "West," some developing-country governments are increasingly resisting (and finding it domestically popular to do so) diktats from the international community. In so far as INGOs are perceived as "Western" institutions, they are often the targets of this changing perspective. Their humanitarian role is no longer routinely accepted and they are placed under significant political and security scrutiny.

INGOS ARE SEEN BY INSURGENT GROUPS AS COMPETITORS

In contrast to the liberation movements of the '70s and political insurgencies of the '80s and '90s, many insurgent groups today no longer have international agendas and are less concerned about their reputation internationally. They do not seek international support or recognition outside their areas of operation. They are relatively immune to external pressure and because they are less concerned about their reputation, they are less interested in abiding by international rules. These movements often view NGOs as competitors and an obstacle for the control of local populations. INGO leverage on these groups has considerably diminished recently and obtaining their implicit support for humanitarian operations demands substantial additional effort.

INGO AID INTERVENTIONS AND PROGRAMS AS AN INSINUATION OF IMPORTED VALUES

Culture and values represent important factors in determining how INGOs and our aid are perceived. "Defending the national culture" has been exploited by political movements and some governments to reject "Western conceptions" of individual human rights and charity. Radical Muslim thinkers have also championed the idea of attributing difficulties of the Muslim world to moral decadence stemming from submission to imported values. It is also politically expedient for some governments to use the argument of a cultural divide to consolidate domestic support. Ideas on Enlightenment and 19th century Christian philosophy which founded modern humanitarianism are now seriously questioned.

It is also true that development and even emergency programs are increasingly associated with promoting fundamental societal changes emanating from a notion that the denial of rights is a key cause of poverty. This is in stark contrast to earlier aid approaches that focused on direct delivery of essential products and services. In some contexts this new approach is also challenging the (vested) political or economic interests of some local groups, structures and organisations.

THE PROLIFERATION OF NGOS

An informal review of the international press indicates that some developing country authorities are increasingly suspicious about the activities of NGOs in their territory. In some cases, their views are simply propaganda to justify the rejection of a foreign presence (e.g., to keep embarrassing witnesses at bay). The proliferation of NGOs has nevertheless brought a number of new actors whose goals and methods deviate considerably from mainstream "humanitarianism".

Traditional, long-established NGOs now have to share the field with other actors who are not following the same rules or the same principles and are blurring the image of true and disinterested aid activities with political agenda, yet their actions and declarations have an impact on the whole NGO community.

In recent years, a number of organisations have also been formed with the goal of influencing

1. *This article partly resumes Oxfam International's report "The Right to Survive, the humanitarian challenge for the 21st century".*
2. *Oxfam analysed data from the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) at Louvain University in Belgium.*

'(…) security requires that we are accepted and trusted (…)'

policy decisions and shaping global political perspectives on issues ranging from human rights law to campaigns aimed at protecting the environment. Mainstream NGOs with the best of intentions are commonly supporting joint advocacy statements to support causes, condemn state actions, and launch high-profile calls in the media. Hence, several organisations have been repeatedly accused of promoting ideological and political causes under the guise of advocating universal human rights.

In the last 30 years some intelligence agencies have, unbeknownst to the NGOs, used or created NGOs to gather information in locations where they were not able to maintain a presence or when they wanted to support major political reforms. Since the '90s the generic "NGO" label covers a great variety of different entities, including private, for-profit companies, that do not necessarily uphold the same values or adhere to accepted humanitarian principles as traditional not-for-profit aid organisations.

THE SPECIFIC CHALLENGE OF WORKING IN CONFLICTS

Working in conflict situations is adding to the difficulty. In such a controversial environment, coherent image, strategic communication and extensive networks are of paramount importance to effectively communicate the INGO role and responsibilities and counter-balance negative judgments. In this regard, building up a broad network of contacts among, for example, political, religious or other civil society groups, including some linked to armed groups or similar entities outside the formal structure is the key to creating a more secure environment. Developing connections, targeting the right people, understanding the balance of power, and crafting politically and culturally effective messages are part of a long-term strategy, but in times of crisis the pay-off may be considerable.

In organisations like CARE where the main security strategy is to maintain the humanitarian space by reducing the threat or by having local actors control the threat on our behalf, security requires that we are accepted and trusted by the parties to the conflict that have de facto control over the areas in which we operate. These actors must understand our objectives, and the exclusively humanitarian purpose of our actions.

Recent experiences clearly demonstrate that we cannot work in insecure areas or in politically difficult environments without having direct and indirect contact with all entities which may influence our operations or put our staff at risk.

COMMUNICATING FOR RESULTS: SHAPING HOW WE ARE PERCEIVED

In working environments where development or humanitarian aid is not necessarily taken at face value, perception and image of aid plays a crucial role. In today's global world, news - positive or negative - travels fast between governments, through the Internet, and through informal or formal global networks. Letting reputation slide in one country also affects the integrity and safety of every other program around the world. This is even more obvious in conflict situations where NGOs might easily be accused of being partial. We need among other things a more global strategy on communications, not only aimed at influencing Northern public opinion and donors but also to be used as a strategic tool at the local level in the countries where we work to explain humanitarian principles and INGO roles and responsibilities, invite feedback and participation from the public, influence public opinion or policy, and monitor public perception of INGOs. It calls not only for credible independence and transparency but also for a global reflection on how we are going to manage interactions with our political environment.

BEYOND CONFUSION THE RISK REMAINS

Beyond the questions related to image and perception, it would be naïve to think that all current difficulties faced by aid organisations are the unique result of confusion and misunderstanding and the result of misbehaviour of rogue elements within the NGO community. Recent attacks on NGOs by non-state entities and by governmental forces clearly demonstrate that targeting aid organisations may not be due to faulty perception of the role and responsibilities of NGOs, but is rather part of a deliberate political and military strategy aimed at imposing authority, retaliating against "Western" agencies, and attempting to destabilize domestic opposition. These attacks are done on purpose and will not be deterred even by sound and well-crafted communications strategies and clear understanding of humanitarian mandates. These actions are rather based on a very clever analysis of the symbolic importance of NGOs and the political benefit one can draw from attacking them. For an organisation like CARE, responding to these hostile actions is an unfathomable challenge, which threatens the very existence of its operating model.

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NGOS SECURITY POLICIES: DEFINING THE RISKS WE ARE WILLING TO ACCEPT AND HOW WE DEAL WITH THEM

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"In 2008, 260 humanitarian aid workers were killed, kidnapped or seriously injured in violent attacks. This toll is the highest on record. The overall number of attacks against aid workers has risen steeply over the past three years, with an annual average almost three times higher than the previous nine years. Relative rates of attacks per numbers of aid workers in the field have also increased by 61%."[1]

During the last ten years, NGOs have had to deal with a considerably reduced Humanitarian Space. NGOs need to be able to act with humanity, neutrality, independence and impartiality[2] in order to deliver aid efficiently. But in various contexts this is no longer guaranteed: aid workers face increasingly serious risks in order to carry out their emergency programmes, and in many countries the humanitarian principles do not protect NGOs from attacks anymore.

Therefore, whereas only a few years ago there was no clear overview of how NGOs provided security for their staff and operations, detailed studies - developed mainly by NGOs themselves - have enabled the humanitarian community to develop policies for better management of protection and security of NGOs staff, and to enable NGOs to choose specifically suitable approaches in promoting and providing the highest degree of security possible for their staff. Pioneer in this reflections and debates was Koenraad Von Brabant[3], but a strong impulse was given by People in Aid[4] and the publication of its *Code of Good Practice in the management and support of Aid personnel*.

Humanitarian aid activities are performed by people for people. The effectiveness and success of humanitarian aid initiatives especially depend on the contribution of well-prepared staff capable of operating in inhospitable and dangerous situations. The work of an organisation operating in emergencies places great pressure on its staff. Therefore NGOs cannot ignore the duty of care that they have towards their staff, national and international, and should recognise their responsibility in guaranteeing the physical and psycho-social well-being of each employee, before, during and after working with the NGO.

Many NGOs have elaborated specific policies and procedures to this purpose. Implementation of these policies usually follows a *valuation of the risks* existing in any given context.

In these frameworks, property and resources (equipment, financial, premises, documentary resources) should also be protected. The objective of these efforts is to offer the highest possible levels of security to all staff, without endangering the recipients of the programmes and other interested parties involved in activities in the field (donors, suppliers of services, etc.). It is important to underline that the execution of such security measures does not weaken the attainment of the aims of humanitarian aid, nor does it jeopardise the effectiveness and the efficiency of the programmes and projects. On the contrary, it actually makes their achievement more feasible and increases their quality.

At the core of any security policy are the basic principles of primacy of life and staff's risk level acceptance and right of withdrawal, combined with the organisation's risk management. Different organisations have different policies, but each NGO should adopt a combination of the following three possible security approaches identified for the development of suitable risk management: *consensus, protection and deterrence*.

Consensus is unanimously considered by all NGOs to be the approach that best suits the aims of humanitarian organisations. To carry out a good emergency operation it is fundamental to create consensus. As such, to get high levels of protection and security, NGOs must earn a positive image with project recipients, local social groups and authorities. Consensus is not just something that happens on its own, but it is part of a complex strategy, the success of which depends on:

- the reputation of the NGO and its credibility as a humanitarian aid actor;
- the quality of the staff selected;
- the reputation and reliability of the partners and local actors working together with the NGO;
- the quality and importance of the programmes effected;
- the ability of the NGO to communicate what it is doing in all ways: reports, visibility, media use, administration, HR management etc.

Protection is the second most wide-spread approach adopted by the majority of NGOs. Protection covers all those procedures or means aimed at guaranteeing protection from possible threats, by acting on the vulnerability of staff, property, tools, documents and infrastructure.

'NGOs cannot ignore the duty of care that they have towards their staff (…)'

1. http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/3250.pdf
2. The four cardinal principles of humanitarian aid according to the International Red Cross Code of Conduct.
3. See his Humanitarian Practice Network, "Good Practice Review" n.8: Operational security management in violent environment, 2000.
4. www.peopleinaid.org
5. The document can be downloaded at: http://www.cesvi.eu/?pagina=pagina_generica.php&id=707
6. www.goodhumanitariandonorship.org

'(…) such security measures do not weaken the attainment of the aims of humanitarian aid, (…) it actually makes their achievement more feasible and increases their quality.'

An example of this kind of security policies is the one recently published by Cesvi[5], an Italian NGO active in several high risk countries: Afghanistan, Pakistan, DR Congo, Somalia, Sudan. This document is a framework to organise in a coherent way, practices, tools and procedure already used by the NGO since 2003, but until then formulated only into a small Security Handbook.

Among those organisational tools and systems for security management Cesvi has introduced:

- a Risk Valuation Document regarding headquarters security as per Italian law;
- a General Handbook regarding staff security abroad following DG ECHO's Generic Security Guide;
- Cesvi's short Security Handbook;
- a document for brief definitions of country risks (a country's "traffic light"); and definitions of the profile to be used in each Country;
- a Health protection and emergency plan for each country;
- a Country security plan for all higher-risk countries (according to the Policy, a local Security Manager, in charge for the day by day security issues, should be established in each high risk country);
- an Annual security report;
- a General budget for security measures and trainings at the HQs and in the field;
- a Training plan;
- a Collection and analysis of accident and incident data concerning staff;
- suitable forms of staff insurance and health cover for each country.

This type of approach does not act so much directly against the risks present in the area, but attempts to reduce or eliminate their impact by openly protecting the NGO and acting on its vulnerability. An example of this type of approach are the measures taken to protect premises, such as window bars, night-time lighting, etc., or those regarding transport and communications, such as modern, secure vehicles or reliable communications systems. Regulations governing local and expatriate staff conduct are also regarded as protective measures.

However, in certain countries where NGOs' neutrality is unrecognised, "consensus" and "protection" approaches are no longer sufficient to guarantee an adequate degree of security… NGOs are increasingly seen as a desirable target for a whole series of groups. A few NGOs have therefore also felt it necessary to include a deterrence-based approach in dealing with the risks, such as the use of armed guards, escorts, threats to abandon the area and suspend programmes and aid, or the use of private security companies, etc. **Deterrence** is therefore a counter-threat expressed in legal, economic, political or military terms. Its purpose is not so much to act on risks generally, and implicitly or explicitly on vulnerability, but to use a counter-threat openly to halt or slow down the original threat. The use of such approach remains restricted to specific circumstances in a narrow framework imposed by the NGO internal policy.

In the most critical situations, the different approaches described above also reflect on the definition of an acceptable risk. That is a threshold beyond which it would be better to introduce risk mitigation actions, not to implement or to withdraw. Before resorting to these measures, some questions should be considered:

- Have all possible alternatives been explored to attain the aims of the programmes?
- Has every effort in terms of human and financial resources been made to lower the risk to an acceptable level?
- What strategy has been used in order to prevent non-eliminable risks from growing further?
- Is the impact of implementing the programme high enough to justify the acceptance of a high or very high risk; and what consequences would programme failure or its interruption have?

In conclusion, according to Cesvi's experience, it seems important that NGOs are willing to take care of their staff, keeping into consideration the following factors:

- **The ethic code of conduct:** humanitarian principles and staff code of conduct
- **The human factor:** awareness raising, trainings, security culture, etc.
- **The organisational framework:** security plans, procedures, economic resources, data and info collection, etc.
- **Technical instruments:** radio communications, maps, etc.

The collaboration among NGOs for security management is also extremely important. Networks like the European Interagency Security Forum (EISF) play an important role in this.

NGOs also need a strong support from the main donors to be able to optimally carry out their work. Most of the donors joined the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative and are committed to support best practices and security standards. There is however room for more improvement. Can we expect for the future that all the humanitarian stakeholders will take serious commitments to further enhance the security of humanitarian staff?

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CLOSE LINKS WITH THE MILITARY: A THREAT TO AID WORKERS' SECURITY?

THE ISSUE - HUMANITARIAN AID AND SECURITY

'This blurring of lines (…) puts at risk the perception of independence and impartiality so important (…) to have access to populations in need (…)'

The security situation for aid organizations is getting worse. Especially in Afghanistan, Somalia and Sudan there are more incidents than ever before. The reasons for this increase are manifold. In all of these countries the conflict setting is very complex and involves myriads of different actors.

However, many aid organizations sense that the increasing threats are connected at least partly to the presence and performance of international military. In fact, in most situations with high casualties among aid workers, international military was or is also operating. Yet, there is obviously no monocausal relationship between the presence of the military and the threat level to aid organizations. In addition, data that could help to identify the exact mechanisms of such correlation is lacking. Nevertheless, based on the experiences of aid organizations, one can draw some conclusions with respect to the impact of the military on the security situation of aid organizations.

First of all, it is not the military per se that puts aid organizations at risk. The impact of the military on the work of aid organizations seems to depend rather on the role it is playing in a particular conflict setting. Only if the military is involved actively as a party in a conflict (national armies, UN missions according to Chapter VII Article 42, NATO led intervention forces and occupying powers) it might - under particular circumstances - create a threat to aid organizations.

Second, the security situation of aid organizations seems to tighten if it is not possible to distinguish clearly between military forces involved in a conflict and aid organizations. This problem arises mainly with respect to international troops. There are numerous examples in the day-to-day work of organizations that contribute to blurring the lines between the distinct roles of humanitarian actors and military. Among them is the conduct of humanitarian projects by the military in order to "win the hearts and minds" of the population, the use of civilian cars by the military, the visits of NGO projects without prior notice, and as reported lately from Tajikistan the misuse of medical uniforms by military personnel in order to gain access to private households. This blurring of lines prevents that those armed actors who do acknowledge the importance of humanitarian aid and who are principally willing to differentiate between aid organizations and the military are able to do so. And it puts at risk the perception of independence and impartiality so important to aid organisations to be able to have access to populations in need to deliver aid.

Thirdly, (and this is not very encouraging for aid organizations, who are fighting for a more clear distinction since years) it seems that a clear distinction of military and aid organizations is not sufficient to guarantee security for the latter. Obviously insurgents fighting against the presence of a military force do not always want to distinguish between aid organizations and the military. In fact aid organizations seem to be an easy target, if the aim is to gain public attention. In this respect, a common nationality of aid organization and military forces increases the danger for humanitarian workers.

What conclusions can be drawn from this preliminary analysis? First of all, the decision of aid organizations on how to relate to the military should be based on a careful analysis of the role the (international) military plays in a conflict setting. If the military is party to a conflict, like for example the ISAF/OEF in Afghanistan, the MONUC in DRC, or the UNAMID in Sudan, the decision by aid organizations to clearly distinguish themselves from the military can decrease the probability of attacks against them. In addition, states have responsibility to secure that distinction from the political and military side. European NGOs, through VOICE, have therefore made recommendations to the European Union on civil-military relations in humanitarian action[1].

However, acknowledging that a clear distinction from military actors solves only a part of their security problems in highly risky areas and in particular in the context of military interventions, aid organizations must enter into dialogue with policy makers and donors about their exposure and challenges in the context of military operations settings. The question how and if their security can be ensured must be discussed with great emphasis, if NGOs are to play a continually important role in these contexts. Certainly, the trend to rely more on protection- and even deterrence measures as we can observe at the moment mainly with respect to NGOs from the United States are not a solution to the security problem of NGOs.

Finally, against this background, it is unavoidable that aid organizations turn their attention also to some more general questions concerning their engagement in the context of military interventions. They have to ask themselves under which circumstances they want to work, which compromises they are ready to accept in future, which risks they are willing to take and until which point meaningful work is still possible.

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1. http://www.ngovoice.org/documents/CIV%20MIL%20POLICY%20DOCUMENT%20_%20FINAL.pdf

FROM "SECURITY BY ACCEPTANCE" TO "NO SPACE FOR INTERNATIONAL NGOS?"

THE ISSUE - HUMANITARIAN AID AND SECURITY

In a series of two workshops facilitated by the Network of German Development NGOs (VENRO) and Welthungerhilfe in April and November 2009, representatives of German humanitarian NGOs and speakers of think tanks discussed experiences, recent challenges and approaches to humanitarian aid and rehabilitation in complex situations and growing insecurity contexts.

With the target to stimulate the discussion within the overall triangle of security strategies, namely Acceptance, Protection, and Deterrence, speakers highlighted core issues from different and even controversial perspectives: the difference between peacekeeping and peace enforcement contexts, the role of NGOs, the pro's and contra's of increasing protection as a means to increase security, the pro's and contra's of maintaining distance from the military as a security strategy, and finally the pro's and contra's of communicating with local combatants or violent actors.

The first workshop mainly addressed the causes of insecurity that INGOs are facing and questioned whether "Security by Acceptance" is an outdated approach or if it is still a life saving necessity? The general conclusion is that Acceptance is still the primary concern and major priority of INGOs. However, Acceptance alone provides no insurance for security and it is often complex in itself and hard to fulfil, especially if stakeholders are diverse, and target groups are not at all homogenous. Acceptance is especially at risk when civilian and military mandates are not clearly differentiated or even mixed. In such cases, the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian INGOs also risk being questioned.

The second workshop on the other hand took up different exit strategy options that INGOs have, especially in contexts where the humanitarian and operational space for INGOs is limited or lost: remote control of self-implemented projects as well as the implementation by local partner organisations are major and usual options. When discussing these options, participants clearly acknowledged that the holistic responsibility of humanitarian INGOs for their local teams, for local partners and in particular for the target groups is essential. It was concluded that working through remote control or implementation by local partners should not just result in the transfer of risk from expatriates to locals. The real potential of a successful relief and rehabilitation programme managed this way can only be attained within the framework of a long-term cooperation with partners, including broad capacity building and the transfer of management responsibilities. In addition, the discussion repeatedly focussed on general preconditions of successful participatory development. For the German NGOs active in the discussion, it is essential to adopt an approach truly embedded in Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and

'(…) working through remote control or implementation by local partners should not just result in the transfer of risk (…)'

Development (LRRD). If the collaboration with local partners is however just part of security based exit strategies of INGOs, then quality standards usually suffer and the main objective of supporting the target groups mostly fails. In such cases, different donor agencies might even not allow the continuation of an intervention.

The overall conclusions of the discussion showed that there are no straightforward and general solutions regarding remote control and implementation by local partners in difficult security environments, and that there is still a need for further reflection on this topic. On the one hand, local situations vary widely - even to the extreme that INGOs are not allowed to operate - and also the mandates and approaches of different INGOs lead to different conclusions and reactions.

However, the preliminary synthesis of these workshops led to the identification of four core preconditions for successful project implementation, including in insecure environments with little space for INGOs:

1. Proper selection of approach and local partners
   - long lasting cooperation
   - local "anchoring" of teams and/or partners to facilitate acceptance and ownership

2. Capacity building, for national staff and for local partners
   - proper resource allocation for general project management and organisational development as well as for security (training and hardware)
   - integration of national staff in senior management functions.

3. Delegation and handing over of responsibilities
   - clear focus on quality aspects
   - consider reduction of the complexity of projects/programmes

4. Overall awareness for local cultural and political setups, power structures.

The ongoing discussion also touched upon the need to address security considerations and measures more directly to donor agencies such as ECHO or the German Foreign Office, so that these may even better be accepted as eligible expenses. This, however, still needs a more focused approach and may lead to follow up workshops within the German NGO-community, parallel to meetings to analyse country specific situations.

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THE INSECURITY DILEMMA AND ROLE OF INFORMATION SHARING ON NGO SECURITY MANAGEMENT

THE ISSUE - HUMANITARIAN AID AND SECURITY

'(…) many have realized the benefits that closer collaboration brings to their security (…)'

In recent years, directly targeted attacks against humanitarian staff have risen dramatically. Carjacking, armed robberies, sexual assaults, compound raids, abductions and kidnappings are becoming increasingly common. Good security management must therefore remain an essential part of humanitarian programmes.

Dilemma for NGOs

Providing and maintaining effective security measures in dangerous environments is an expensive business. Clearly NGOs lack financial resources to implement measures such as building "bunkers and fortresses" for its staff, as one colleague put it, or strengthening their protective and deterrent measures, including hiring armed guards, like the UN and International Governmental Organisations (IGOs) are expected to do in Kabul in the aftermath of the 28th October high profile attack on a UN guesthouse.[1]

The danger is that if the UN and IGOs spend more on their own security, without a corresponding improvement of security measures for NGOs operating in the same theatre, they will effectively transfer significant risks to NGOs. Furthermore, ethical and moral dilemmas prohibit some NGOs from using armed protection. Most prefer keeping a low profile and building acceptance with the local community. However, as already proven in some conflict environments, especially where there have been conscious manipulations of humanitarian needs for political and military strategies, NGOs are forced to adopt harder protection and deterrence measures for their staff. Such actions must be counterbalanced by a corresponding increase in resources for acceptance in order to achieve long term security.

Information sharing among humanitarian actors

Humanitarian delegations are getting better at sharing information. Indeed a recent survey[2] conducted by Christian Aid to review the extent of security collaboration between the UN and NGOs in the field and the implementation of the Saving Lives Together (SLT)[3] framework, identified information sharing as one of the highest priorities for coordination amongst all categories of NGOs surveyed. Of the 205 respondents from 72 organisations that responded, 88% of those from International NGOs, and 61% National NGOs reported that their organisations permitted information sharing. It seems that many have realized the benefits that closer collaboration brings to their security, yet significant barriers to information and resource sharing persist.

Barriers to information sharing

In the past, the greatest barrier to information sharing was the attitudes of the then security professionals who were primarily recruited from security forces bringing with them a 'classified' mentality.

With the increasing security challenges, the positions have evolved, resulting in more and better exchange of information including security review reports, situational analysis, incident reports, and security management plans. However lack of trust continues to hinder progress. As most information is shared on informal basis, and due to the lack of information sharing protocols, there are no assurances that confidentiality would be maintained.

However with the shrinking humanitarian space[4], and eroded perception of humanitarian independence in environments such as Sudan, Afghanistan and Somalia, organisations are becoming more and more conscious that they cannot operate in isolation.

The Role of Security Networks

NGO security networks play a major role in fostering trust and collaboration. A great example is the European Interagency Security Forum (EISF[5]). When the network was first formed in mid 2005, exchange of information was only happening between four people who already had a good working relationship. Today, the forum has become the focal point for professional exchange of security information, good practices and security advocacy for its 70 members, but also has links with all major humanitarian security forums, and key researchers globally. At field level, ANSO (Afghanistan), NSP (Somalia), and GANSO (Gaza) are examples of other networks playing a leading role in encouraging collaboration.

Way forward

On 29th and 30th October, security managers from the UN and NGOs held a conference in Geneva to discuss ways of strengthening security collaboration between the UN, NGOs and IGOs in the field. The high level meeting recognised the increasingly deteriorating security environment and agreed that there was an urgent need to commit to the concept and strategy of Saving Lives Together (SLT) and to ensure closer collaboration. The SLT framework is now in its final stages of review. It is expected that with the renewed enthusiasm, and interest shown by donors to provide the necessary financial resources to this effort, this will lead to better coordination. True success will however depend on whether or not the UN shows strong leadership in ensuring compliance by its field managers. Secondly, NGOs must be considered as equal partners and not as beneficiaries of the UN security system, and therefore having a say when it comes to allocation of resources.

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1. Secretary-General's Remarks to the General Assembly on Staff Security, New York, 30 October 2009 - http://www.un.org/apps/sg/sgstats.asp?nid=4201
2. Christian Aid, Saving Lives Together: A Review of Security Collaboration between the UN and Humanitarian Actors on the Ground, Nov 2009
3. "Saving Lives Together: : A Framework for improving Security Arrangements Among IGOs, NGOs and UN in the Field" was launched by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) to serve as a framework of best practices on security collaboration.
4. Here Humanitarian space is defined as 'a space of freedom in which humanitarians are free to evaluate needs, provide aid and maintain dialogue with affected communities' - derived from; J Grombach, An IHL/ICRC perspective on 'humanitarian space', Humanitarian Exchange Magazine, Issue 32, Dec 2005
5. EISF is a network of Security Heads of European international humanitarian agencies. Its objective is to facilitate collaboration and information exchange on security issues among the European and international humanitarian community at headquarter and field levels.

HUMANITARIAN AID AND FRAGILITY

A VIEW ON THE EU

'(…) the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid states clearly that EU Humanitarian Aid is not a crises management tool.'

Why is the European Union (EU) debate on Fragile States relevant to humanitarians? Many of the countries classified as Fragile States are the scene of so-called forgotten emergencies and/or the delivery of humanitarian aid. Through different initiatives, the EU seeks to develop more consistent and effective policies for engagement with these states. An increased EU focus on security and crises management policies underpins the debate, and the link between development and security - the so-called development-security nexus - features prominently. The European Commission (EC) and Member States strive to ensure complementarity of the different EU external policy tools such as e.g. development and trade measures. It goes without question that Humanitarian Aid is another one. However, and it is essential, the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid states clearly that EU Humanitarian Aid is not a crises management tool. There is a risk that EU Humanitarian Aid could become instrumentalised for political and security purposes rather then being based on the humanitarian principles and on the need of crises affected populations alone. VOICE and several of its members have therefore been monitoring the process since 2007.

In 2007

The Portuguese Presidency commissioned a study on fragile states[1], which describes the different tools the EU has available to respond to fragile and difficult environments. VOICE ensured that the specificity of Humanitarian Aid was clearly stated. The study indicates that *"The context of fragile situations and difficult environments is substantially and qualitatively different from other developing countries in their characteristics and problems, with unique features that require adapted policy responses and approaches"*.[2]

It therefore argues for the need for EU engagement in fragile environments to be adapted to context. Its main focus should be to help national reformers to build legitimate, effective and resilient state institutions. The study considers it a strength that in many of these countries the EU is a main donor and that there is an increasing link between development policies and European Security and Defense Policy missions. However, coordination and coherence between the different institutions and instruments have to be improved in order to be useful. The important role of non-state actors as an entry point to engage in situations of fragility is also featured.

In parallel, DG Development started developing an EC Communication.[3] An "issues paper" stressed the specificity of EU Humanitarian Aid, but stated that often exactly this might make it difficult for the EU to use it as a means to overcome fragility, and that it is therefore of outmost importance that more long-term development activities are started

as early as possible. The Final Communication states only that: *"Humanitarian aid aims at saving lives and providing immediate relief for victims of crises, regardless of the level of fragility and the causes of the crisis. Existing procedures to mobilize humanitarian aid are adapted to this approach."*

In a parallel process, the EC including DG ECHO, also drew up a policy paper on Security and Development, which included a chapter on Humanitarian Aid, but of which the conclusions were not made available to the public. .

In 2008

As a follow up to this, Council conclusions and a European Parliament resolution on situations of fragility, DG Development consulted civil society on six pilot country case studies.[4]

As a follow up on the above mentioned EC paper on Security and Development, a study was commissioned by DG Relex under the Stability Instrument looking into a range of countries[5] which also receive humanitarian aid from the EU. It gives the following recommendations: to consult humanitarian actors both during planning and implementation of EU military missions; to limit the role of the military to providing a secure environment and logistic support if necessary; and to deploy civil-military liaison officers.

In 2009

It was agreed that one action plan for both fragility and security related activities would make sense. A draft was consulted with civil society in November. Concerning the specificity of EU humanitarian aid it states: *"Even though any humanitarian operation must remain under the overall authority and control of the responsible humanitarian organisation, there is a need to ensure coherence between relief, stabilisation, rehabilitation and longer term developmental activities (…) Where feasible, the impact on local sociological, cultural and economic dynamics by the (simultaneous) presence of international security, humanitarian and development actors should be analysed in advance."* It is to be welcomed that the document is designed in the spirit of the Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development approach. But it should recognize the impact EU military missions might have on the perception of roles of the different EU actors, and does not take toll of ongoing institutional changes in the EU, especially the creation of the European External Action Service. In 2010 joint EU strategies will be developed for Zimbabwe and Yemen. This will be an opportunity to see how the different EU policies regarding fragility translate into action.

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1. *"An adequate EU response strategy to address situations of fragility and difficult environments", European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) and Instituto de Estudos Estratégicos e Internacionais (IEEI), 2007*
2. *http://www.ecdpm.org/Web_ECDPM/Web/Content/Download.nsf/0/2E41EC1AD61B2883C125733200499A73/$FILE/pdf-%20EUFS_finalDraft_JUL09.pdf*
3. *"Towards an EU response in situations of fragility", http://ec.europa.eu/development/icenter/repository/COMM_PDF_COM_2007_0643_F_EN_ACTE.pdf*
4. *Burundi, Yemen, Guinea Bissau, Timor Leste, Haiti and Sierra Leone*
5. *South Africa, Aceh, the Central African Republic, Chad, Afghanistan and Colombia*

HOW STRICT ADHERENCE TO HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES ENABLES LOCAL NGOS AND INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS TO DELIVER LIFE-SAVING AID IN SOMALIA

FIELD FOCUS

'(…) local NGOs and Somali staff of international NGOs are therefore on the frontline of delivering aid'

As the EU seeks to increase its involvement in Somalia through greater support to the security sector in the country, it must not neglect the reality that nearly half of the population of Somalia - 3.64 million people - is in need of humanitarian assistance. This number has doubled since the beginning of 2008 and the crisis continues to deteriorate due to the destructive combination of the worst drought Somalia has seen in a decade, conflict continuing to force people to flee their homes, and record-high prices for food and essential items including water and shelter. Against this backdrop, humanitarian aid is declining.

Somalia remains one of the most dangerous places in the world to deliver life-saving aid: more than 40 aid workers have been killed since the start of 2008, and many more held hostage; 13 still remain in captivity. Due to this extreme insecurity on the ground, few international NGOs maintain an operational presence in the south and central parts of Somalia; local NGOs and Somali staff of international NGOs are therefore on the frontline of delivering aid. In addition to its on-going development initiatives, Oxfam International works with 12 humanitarian NGOs in Somalia, supporting them to provide critically needed water, food, shelter and public health to hundreds of thousands of people as well as carrying out training to equip them with the skills to deal with emergencies in their own communities.

The obstacles to delivering aid in Somalia are uniquely challenging, but Oxfam and its Somali partners have developed ways of working to overcome these difficulties. Building and maintaining trust and local acceptance - both between international organisations and local NGOs and especially between local NGOs and communities - is not only a best practice in its own right, but is also vital to preserve, and in some cases create, the conditions necessary for NGOs to meet the needs of people in crisis.

Despite the challenge of delivering programmes in Somalia, accountability between Oxfam and its local NGO partners is ensured through direct field monitoring of our local partners, regular meetings in parts of the country that are accessible as well as through consistent and detailed information sharing, and project visits whenever possible. Peer reviews by other NGOs, evaluations by community structures, and independent monitoring by expert firms also promote accountability to both donors and to beneficiary communities, who through consultation processes also determine who is most in need and who should benefit from a particular project. It is this mutual trust that enables Somali NGOs to respond to restrictions on their working environment and create the space necessary to carry out their life-saving programmes. For example, an Oxfam NGO partner implementing a "cash for work" program was confronted by an armed group that demanded a portion of the money on a weekly basis. The NGO immediately enlisted the support of the elders who originally endorsed the project, and also the support of elders from the surrounding local villages. Through sustained negotiations, which highlighted the humanitarian aspect of the program, the armed group was convinced to drop their demands.

Whilst these experiences demonstrate that it is possible to deliver aid in an accountable and effective way in Somalia, Oxfam International acknowledges that the process is fraught with difficulties. However, Oxfam believes that the humanitarian imperative obliges us to constantly explore and undertake rigorous and innovative methods to ensure effective monitoring of our aid delivery. Fundamental to the work of NGOs is the adherence to the key humanitarian principles of transparency, impartiality, independence and neutrality. By consulting with local communities and gaining their trust, Oxfam and its partners are assured of protection and acceptance both of which are essential for aid work to be successful. It is of vital importance that donors recognise and support the efforts of NGOs to accountably deliver aid in accordance with these principles and continue to fund life-saving programmes based on the extreme humanitarian needs on the ground.

Recommendations to the EU

The EU, as one of the largest donors to Somalia, has a key role to play in this respect. Despite the rapidly growing need on the ground, humanitarian funding to Somalia has reduced, with funding from the European Commission declining from $32.9m to $23.5m this year. While this decline is not as substantial as reductions by other donors, any reduction in funding at a time when humanitarian needs have doubled is inappropriate, and is particularly troubling at a time when the EU is planning to invest significant amounts of money in military training in Somalia. As the EU looks to expand its engagement in security sector support, it must ensure that funding to this area does not come at the expense of its humanitarian aid commitments. Moreover, given the critical role local NGOs on the ground are playing in Somalia, the EU should maintain and expand humanitarian funding designed to build the skills of local Somali aid agencies to conduct their life-saving work, and to be accountable to the communities they serve as well as those who fund their work.

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HUMANITARIAN ISSUES
AT EU LEVEL

VOICE AT WORK

Securing the Emergency Aid Reserve (EAR) - This year again, the availability of funds for the Emergency Aid Reserve (EAR), which serves as ECHO's financial buffer to respond to unforeseen crises, was under threat. VOICE lobbied strongly with the Members of the European Parliament, which has an important budgetary power. VOICE stressed the importance of the EAR for the timely and efficient delivery of humanitarian assistance, and ensured that the European Parliament requested to restore the EAR payment appropriations that had been cut by the Council for the EU 2010 budget. The budgetary issue is a recurrent one, and VOICE continues to monitor it closely.

Keeping humanitarian aid out of the future European External Action Service - With recent developments on the Lisbon Treaty, the European External Action Service (EEAS - a new joint diplomatic body of the EU to be set up to assist the EU High Representative) is again highly topical on the EU agenda. Discussions and preparation continue to happen behind closed doors. However, VOICE has followed up as closely as possible on the state of play of the process and more specifically on the possible implications for humanitarian aid. In various fora like meetings with EU Member States and institutions, and roundtables, VOICE repeatedly underlined the risks of instrumentalisation for humanitarian aid if it should become part of the EEAS, and the subsequent need to keep humanitarian aid outside of the EEAS.

Dialogue with the Swedish Presidency - The Swedish Presidency representatives to the Council Working Group on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA) showed great interest in maintaining close dialogue with VOICE. VOICE briefed the Swedish Presidency at the onset of their mandate on members' main priorities and concerns. The VOICE Board also had a valuable exchange with the Swedish COHAFA representative in Stockholm.

In addition, VOICE organised a Roundtable on Humanitarian Aid in Stockholm in partnership with its Swedish members and other Swedish NGOs. This event offered an excellent opportunity for exchange between NGOs from Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Norway and the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Swedish International Development Agency, and the European Commission.

Thanks to the good working relations established with the Swedish representatives to the COHAFA, VOICE has also engaged in regular informal meetings with the Swedish Ambassador to the Political and Security Committee (PSC) of the Council. Traditional interlocutors of the PSC are human rights NGOs. It is thus a great achievement for VOICE to be able to bring humanitarian issues to this table.

Civil Society Organisations on Aid Effectiveness - VOICE collaborates in the CONCORD Working Group (WG) on Civil Society Organisation (CSO) on Aid Effectiveness. The WG has the objective to provide European input to the international discussion in the so-called Open Forum . The aid effectiveness agenda is of outmost importance in the development sector as it follows the Paris Declaration (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action. VOICE answered members request to bridge the gap between Humanitarian Aid and Development in such policy discussion related to quality and accountability. VOICE shared the experience and best practices that the Humanitarian Aid sector has gained with the development sector. Lately the WG has decided to focus on "impact" and impact assessment; which are issues that are currently being discussed in the humanitarian sector and are closely followed by the VOICE Secretariat.

Food Aid Convention - For the first time ever since the Food Aid Convention (FAC) was established in 1967, the EU has mandated DG ECHO to speak in its name. This reflects a drastic change in the European approach vis-à-vis the Convention and the Food Aid Committee (composed by the major international donors). Few weeks before the next Committee in December 2009, DG ECHO has requested VOICE to organise a consultation with main NGO actors in food assistance / food security. The main recommendations that will be drawn from this consultation will hopefully support DG ECHO advocacy work to revise the FAC; and reinforce the recurrent message that civil society needs to be engaged in the FAC discussions.

1. *www.cso-effectiveness.org*