

FOCUS: Partnerships for humanitarian aid

From the VOICE Secretariat

Partnership is essential in humanitarian action. No single agency is able to tackle the increasing humanitarian needs by itself, certainly in the case of mega disasters such as the floods in Pakistan or more recently the famine in the Horn of Africa. For the last decade, and especially since the Indian Ocean tsunami, traditional humanitarian actors have worked hard to strengthen their cooperation in emergencies. The UN-led humanitarian reform resulted in the establishment of clusters for coordination of activities, the search for ways to improve humanitarian leadership and the quest for predictable and rapid financing through the wider use of pooled funds.

In addition, in 2007 the UN, Red Cross and NGOs agreed on the Principles of Partnership (PoP): equality, transparency, results-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity. NGOs are convinced that effective forms of partnership will lead to overall greater aid effectiveness, benefiting crisis-affected populations. However, is partnership between traditional humanitarian actors sufficient? What about cooperation with other civil society actors? And to what extent is partnership with donors possible? The first articles in this issue reflect on various modes of collaboration between NGOs, while other articles look into partnerships with the UN, donors and private partners.

In the 'View on the EU' section, we are proud to present an interview with Kristalina Georgieva, EU Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response. In the interview, the Commissioner sets out her views on partnership - particularly relevant as the humanitarian aid department of the European Commission works with about 200 partners - and reflects on other current EU humanitarian topics.

Lastly, the field focus looks at the crisis in Yemen, where current violent opposition aimed at toppling the regime is further worsening the on-going humanitarian crisis in the country.

VOICE OUT LOUD aims to contribute to the understanding of the professional reality of humanitarian NGOs and to give an insight into relevant humanitarian issues, relying upon the experience and input of VOICE members. It is addressed to European decision makers and other stakeholders of the humanitarian community, as well as the wider interested public.

VOICE

VOICE stands for Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies. It is a network representing 83 European non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in humanitarian aid worldwide. VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor with the European Union on emergency aid, relief, rehabilitation and disaster risk reduction. As a European network, it represents and promotes the values and specificities of humanitarian NGOs, in collaboration with other humanitarian actors.

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 Humanitarian agencies have not only been innovative in terms of practice but also with respect to inventing new concepts. One of these is the concept of partnership. Generally speaking, partnership is not only desirable but also necessary. If one assumes that resources are getting scarcer and that collective action (from systematic coordination to joint project implementation) leads to greater efficiency if not effectiveness, then partnership may indeed be necessary. However, as is often the case, broad concepts, as attractive as they may sound, are difficult to translate into practice. Moreover, partnership is what people make of it. Partnerships cannot be established from one day to another. Even if the potential partners commit themselves to joint activities, this might be insufficient. If their expectations and aspirations do not match, partnership may even be counterproductive. In a recent paper, Hearn and Mendizabalⁱ proposed a number of criteria for making networks operational. These five criteria (knowledge management, amplification and advocacy, community building, convening, and mobilising resources) can easily be used as a guideline for the various types of partnerships organisations envisageⁱⁱ.

In reality there are different kinds of partnerships, at different levels, which all have particular opportunities and challenges. A first level is the relationship between donors and humanitarian agencies. A second is the relationship between the humanitarian agencies themselves, as well as between the staff at headquarters and in the field. Thirdly, there is the relationship between international humanitarian organisations and so-called local organisations: the potential partners in the countries where the international humanitarian organisations intervene. And finally there is the relationship between humanitarian organisations and governments (or the actors controlling the affected territory). One can easily agree that partnership as a general principle is necessary and desirable in order to improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness of emergency relief aid based on the principles of humanitarian action. But there are problems, some of which are briefly discussed below.

If the general observation of the politicization of humanitarian aid is in fact a reality, the way donors allocate their resources is the most important challenge to this particular partner relationship. But even if the donors and the humanitarian agencies agree on the (non-politicised) priorities for specific emergencies, administrative requirements may again work against partnership. The FPAⁱⁱⁱ working group of VOICE has been working for a number of years towards an adaptation of the administrative rules of ECHO^{iv} which matches the reality in the field. Nobody would deny the need for clear rules and procedures in the financing of emergencies, but not every rule and procedure imposed on the recipient humanitarian organisations may be meaningful from the perspective of effective aid.

Partnership between humanitarian organisations is a second dimension. The diversity of NGOs, for example, may be a barrier to partnerships. One of the most contested issues is the notion of neutrality. But there is also a practical aspect that makes partnership difficult, namely the different internal rules and regulations that NGOs have. Moreover, NGOs seem to have a tendency to stress their differences rather than their commonalities.

A third kind of potential partnership is between international humanitarian organisations and their local counterparts, yet this one is very often difficult to implement. One aspect may be the level of qualification of the local partners- even if there are numerous cases showing that national NGOs have achieved a high degree of professionalism, for example in Pakistan, Bangladesh or Malaysia. However, donors, it seems, are generally reluctant to fund these partnerships which may include training for the local partner.

Finally, there is the partnership with the governments or other actors in the countries of intervention. While this is important, the issue of sovereignty and political strategies may still limit the operating space of humanitarian agencies.

Given these difficulties, it may be worthwhile looking more closely at the principles on which we base our partnerships. It is evident that a partnership requires some up-front costs. But in the longer run the returns may be much larger than the initial investment. In addition, especially with the so-called 'local partners', this may silence the critique of Western domination; a critique which both donors and humanitarians have to take seriously.

ⁱ Background Note "Not everything that connects is a network". ODI, London, May 2011.

ⁱⁱ For an overview of these different types as well as case studies on partnerships in practice, see e.g. ODI, Humanitarian Exchange 50, April 2011


ⁱⁱⁱ Framework Partnership Agreement.

^{iv} The humanitarian aid department of the European Commission.

THE ALLIANCE2015 PARTNERSHIP: A CONSORTIUM EXPERIENCE IN THE 2010 PAKISTAN FLOOD RESPONSE

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*'Some agencies are looking at models of partnership as a way of ensuring increased coordination, effectiveness and impact.(...)
By joining forces, our organisations can have greater impact without giving up individual philosophies, approaches or brands'*

 An increasing number of disasters, of greater complexity and impact, and a general deterioration in security have combined to make the operating environment of humanitarian action increasingly challenging. Yet the last twenty years have seen an amazing growth in both the number of humanitarian actors and the overall value of their operations. The number and variety of actors are still growing fast, contributing to increasing competition for resources, operating space and profile, and related difficulties in achieving the efficient leadership and coordination essential to large scale emergency responses.

Faced with these challenges, some agencies are looking at models of partnership as a way of ensuring increased coordination, effectiveness and impact.

Alliance2015 is a partnership of seven European NGOs working in the field of development cooperation and humanitarian response. The Alliance2015 members are People in Need (PIN) from the Czech Republic, IBIS from Denmark, ACTED from France, Welthungerhilfe from Germany, Concern Worldwide from Ireland, Cesvi from Italy and Hivos from the Netherlands¹. In 2010, the seven members had projects in 80 countries, and a total income over €635 million.

While striving to consolidate this partnership by developing new ways of working together, our goal is not to become a monolithic block, but to respect and benefit from the diversity of our member organisations' areas of focus and expertise. By joining forces, our organisations can have greater impact without giving up individual philosophies, approaches or brands.

Alliance2015's joint experience in emergencies started in 2003 and has taken various forms since then, from peer funding, to staff secondment, joint assessments, operations and evaluations. Each member's Emergency Coordinator/Manager belongs to the Alliance2015 Emergency Working Group (EWG) which meets regularly and has conference calls within 48 hours of any emergency in which an Alliance member is involved. The EWG has developed common procedures for emergency assessments, proposal and report writing and ways of working in co-operation.

The strength of this partnership was put to the test in the huge humanitarian response that followed the devastating floods in Pakistan in 2010, when some donors (e.g. ECHO) sought to encourage organisations to work in partnership,

in the form of consortia. While consortia are not a new phenomenon in humanitarian aid, they have occurred more frequently in longer term and large scale development initiatives than in humanitarian responses. If what happened in Pakistan is the start of a new trend, it is essential that we reflect on the advantages and challenges of this model.

From a donor perspective, consortia may make a lot of sense. They allow a smaller number of larger grants to be disbursed - transferring the administrative burden of grant management from the donor to the lead agency, allowing donors to 'go to scale' in response to major disasters in a way that is manageable and capable of allocating a greater percentage of their budget through NGOs.

For the Alliance2015 members, despite a tradition of cooperation in emergencies, it was the first time all agencies with an emergency mandate (ACTED, Cesvi, Concern Worldwide, PIN and Welthungerhilfe) would work together in a Consortium to respond to a large scale disaster. We had to rapidly adapt our partnership commitments. This required a clear articulation of the particular competencies that we would bring to improving the overall impact of collective action. It also brought up specific challenges in relation to how we would develop joint programme plans and budgets in the very tight timeframe implied by the emergency. In line with the growing tradition of cooperating in response to emergencies, Pakistan saw the first consortium response involving the five Alliance2015 members with an emergency mandate (ACTED, Cesvi, Concern Worldwide, People in Need and Welthungerhilfe).

Working as part of a consortium brought some real advantages:

- It allowed smaller organisations or partners with limited operational capacity, to position themselves as part of a much larger response and to access funding they might not have otherwise received. This allowed a larger overall operation and greater impact on beneficiaries.
- Joint assessments and negotiations on the most effective response helped ensure a more holistic response, building on the competencies of each organisation.
- It avoided duplication and reduced competition between the partners.
- In some cases, it allowed economies of scale and greater learning from each other.
- The intensive cooperation fostered a strong team spirit and opened opportunities for learning, advocacy and new initiatives.

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‘Agencies have different standards and ways of working, and it is only when entering operational partnerships that the nature of such differences appears’

However, for five different organisations to work so closely together in new programme areas in response to a massive sudden-onset emergency, was also challenging and we feel that these challenges could potentially be true for a larger number of organisations:

- Deciding to work together is one thing. Rapidly determining who does what and where is much more complex. Agencies have different standards and ways of working, and it is only when entering operational partnerships that the nature of such differences appears.
- Selecting geographical and sectoral areas of work also depends on the overall coordination of actors - often complex in large scale emergencies. It is difficult, from the onset of the emergency, to plan in such a way that the different interventions will fit within the wider response and complement each other with an impact stronger than the sum of the parts.
- The understanding and management of local partners may also be very different depending on individual approaches to partnership and access to capacity building funds.
- The elaboration of the initial consortium agreement can be time consuming, including the process of selecting the Lead Agencyⁱ: even in the case of Alliance2015, where prior inter-agency agreements existed, none of them was designed to address the higher levels of responsibility taken by the Lead Agency and had to be strengthened.
- Specific components of such agreements need to be considered:
- The share of administration costs: fortunately, Alliance2015 partners had devised a formula that applies to all consortia situations, takes into account the additional responsibilities held by the Lead Agency, and ensures that the other partners receive an allocation proportional to their engagement.
- Harmonising reporting instruments: this was complex as systems differ between organisations. In Pakistan, Alliance2015 members devised a simple common monthly reporting format that allowed the Lead Agency and all members to keep track of overall progress.
- The size of the grant has a direct knock-on effect on the level of risk taken on by the Lead Agency as it would be held accountable if one of its partners failed to deliver on their intervention or to follow donor requirements. As such, clear criteria and agreements were needed in terms

of respective obligations and ways of resolving disputes. Abiding by such rules needs good peer knowledge and experience and good inter-agency communications at all levels.

The list of challenges could also include a number of issues that, in the midst of an emergency, can cause complications: the number of meetings needed to come to a joint agreement at times when cluster meetings alone could fill one’s day; any lack of mutual confidence in each other; different organisational cultures and approaches; and different sources of funding - with consequent potential conflicting priorities and reporting requirements. In the case of Alliance2015 partners, these were mitigated by the early visit and support of members of the Emergency Working Group and managers from respective head-quarters.

Despite all of this, it is clear that working together as a consortium enabled all five agencies to respond in a way that addressed the immediate needs of a larger number of beneficiaries than would have been possible had we responded individually.

We undertook an internal learning process that highlighted some frustration with the slow pace of establishing the first consortium agreement, when all of the challenges noted above had to be addressed for the first time. The initial slowdown could be an indicator of the limitations of consortia in the very first phase of an emergency unless the agencies have a robust joint emergency preparedness plan already in place. The time spent clarifying and resolving these issues in the initial period of the response meant that the implementation phase went extremely well and set an excellent foundation for future consortia applications. Further, the fact that most Alliance2015 members had other sources of funding meant that we were able to become operational before the consortium could be set in operation.

Most importantly though, we resolved these issues, and planning the second and third joint initiatives under ECHO funding became easier and allowed stronger synergies, division of labour and greater collective impact. This strengthens the argument for encouraging organisations to work together in emergency preparedness and Disaster Risk Reduction and for donors to support such essential efforts.


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Alliance 2015
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ⁱ People in Need, ACTED, Welthungerhilfe, Concern Worldwide Ireland and Cevsil are VOICE members.

ⁱⁱ Under ECHO rules, the Lead Agency is the contract signatory bearing full responsibility for the project.

A PARTNERSHIP FOR SUPPORTING HUMANITARIAN VOLUNTEERING

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 *The European **Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps** was officially established via the Treaty of Lisbon, as a “framework for joint contributions from young Europeans to the humanitarian aid operations of the Union” (see also VOICE Position Paper). DG ECHO is tasked with developing the Voluntary Corps, and preparatory measures include pilot projects to explore possible aspects of how it might work, prior to drafting a legislative EC proposal on the Corps in 2012.*

One of the pilot programmes is managed via a partnership between the NGO Save the Children UK, the network of European universities providing humanitarian studies, NOHA (Network of Humanitarian Assistance) and Bioforce, a non-profit training institute specialising in humanitarian aid issues. We asked some of the stakeholders involved in the project to give us their views on the initiative.

The aim of our pilot project is ‘to build humanitarian talent, capacity and solidarity while contributing to the establishment of the Voluntary Corps’.

This is a new partnership between three different specialised organisations from the humanitarian sector in a pilot programme designed to substantially enhance the calibre of humanitarian staff and leadership through rigorous training and experience. The ultimate aim is to improve the capacity of the EU to provide strong leadership and effective aid response to humanitarian crises and provide direct inputs to an eventual humanitarian voluntary corps.

There are also three associate organisations involved in the project whose role is to host volunteer deployments in humanitarian contexts, which broadens the pan-European nature of the project; these are Caritas Czech Republic, Save the Children Denmark and Johanniter (Germany). Volunteer deployment placements are also being provided by International Medical Corps (UK). Several VOICE members are thus involved.

On the surface, no one would disagree about the theoretical benefits of working in a partnership: the added value and creative thinking, the extra capacity and resources. However, in order to ensure that the benefits are reaped from these relationships it is important to ensure that an appropriate time investment is made in order to put the foundation blocks in place. Like the building of a house, a flimsy foundation will lead to a flimsy building, prone to collapse at the first sign of a storm. Cutting these essential corners could lead to the opposite of what was intended with a drain on time, people and resources.

It’s tempting to gloss over banal issues such as terms of reference, decision making processes, contingency planning, risk assessments but they can save hours of deliberations and disagreements down the line. The international element brings a whole new dimension to partnership’s working, as issues such as time and location differences, managing remote relationships, employment law anomalies, pay differences and contrasting financial models can add a plethora of complexities to an already challenging landscape.

WE ARE LEARNING THAT EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP REQUIRES:

- Managing expectations and having a clear, agreed and written understanding of how the Partners will work together.
- Realising that developing an effective partnership takes a great deal of time.
- Working out a decision making process and contingency plans when decisions cannot follow the usual process,
- Being mindful of different cultural ways of working and communicating.
- Recognising the importance of meeting face to face to build relationships and the “spirit” as well as the letter of partnerships
- Being aware of employment and legislative differences in different countries
- Costing differences in different projects

In summary, effective partnerships need significant organisational and personal investment in order to ensure that programmes have an impact and add maximum value. We look forward to capitalising on the diversity of our partnership to make our pilot project a success!!

**Gillian O’Connell (Senior People Development and Training Manager)
and Catherine Russ (Senior Humanitarian Learning and Development Advisor),
Save the Children UK, www.savethechildren.org.uk**

The new Voluntary Corps is a challenging and controversial reality. NOHA is aware of this and has decided to take active part in it in order to get the best of this new Humanitarian reality in Europe. Why is NOHA participating in this programme? Because we believe in the professionalization of the humanitarian sector, and that means essentially appropriate values, knowledge, tools and accountability for new humanitarian actors. Strong education and training is a condition 'sine qua non' to achieve this. NOHA can contribute more than 18 years of experience in educating humanitarian professionals across the world.

The Voluntary Corps was defined in the Lisbon Treaty in an ambiguous and generic way which leaves the door open for many interpretations. NOHA is committed to help in getting the most ambitious, rigorous and professional interpretation of it, and we want to do this in partnership with other key humanitarian actors. We believe that building a strong partnership among academia, training centres and practitioners, as well as donors is the best way to ensure a successful humanitarian programme. Moreover, this kind of partnership enriches each partner while opening new dimensions and synergies to improve professionalization of the sector.

NOHA is conscious that we all have a lot to learn; we are not convinced we have solutions to 'square the Voluntary Corps circle', but we are committed with the humanitarian sector, and want to contribute by offering our experience in high-level humanitarian education. This has been translated into a condensed course that Corps' volunteers received in September 2011, which included the main topics of humanitarianism. Our aim is to ensure that the volunteers deployed have a comprehensive perspective of the humanitarian world, as well as a humble and respectful position vis-à-vis the people they will be working with. In our view, this combination of excellent education and training and a set of personal attitudes are the essential basis for building professional and principled Voluntary Corps programme.

Fernando Almansa, Chief Executive Officer, NOHA, www.nohanet.org

The first volunteers in the framework of the 2011 pilot projects for the 'European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps' will be deployed in October. Already 25 enthusiastic of these are currently following a one-month training programme. They will be part of the most tangible legacy of the European Year of Volunteering 2011.

We have gone a long way since the idea of the Corps first came up in 2004. Since then "Why on earth should we use volunteers in EU Humanitarian Aid operations?", was probably the mostly frequently asked question DG ECHO has faced. The approach we have taken aims to provide a couple of answers to this fundamental question.

Why volunteers? The EU and its Member States are still the biggest donors in the humanitarian field worldwide. We have high hopes that this becomes a programme of solidarity in action: the EU volunteers will add a human face to our efforts in this field, allowing Europeans to contribute with their hands, in addition to our funds. And professionalism is of course key in humanitarian aid – but who said that well-trained and well-managed volunteers do not provide high quality services?

What added value can the Corps bring? In the context of the first round of pilot projects several of the most professional and renowned humanitarian organisations have pooled their expertise to recruit, train and deploy volunteers together. We can start to see the Corps' potential to generate this kind of partnership within the humanitarian family.

It goes without saying that some answers still need to be found: How to tailor the programme best to real local needs and demands, in addition to the interest of keen Europeans wanting to make a difference? Is there a place for Civil Protection activities? What role could other actors such as the business sector play? So, there is plenty on our plate for the next round of pilot projects in 2012 that could explore some of these dimensions, before the Commission then proposes the final structure of the Corps.

Markus Held (Focal point European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps), DG ECHO, http://ec.europa.eu/echo/index_en.htm

Since its foundation in the 1950s, Johanniter-Unfall-Hilfe.V. ('Johanniter') has relied on the dedication and support of volunteers, both for its work inside its native Germany (where the organisation is strongly involved in civil protection activities) as well as outside Europe, in humanitarian emergencies, youth work and care for the elderly and sick. On top of approximately 13.000 permanent staff members and 22.000 volunteers working closely together in Germany, Johanniter maintains a humanitarian volunteer programme which is coordinated by its Department for International Assistance. Indeed, in addition to coordinating projects in 27 countries worldwide, Johanniter already maintains and trains a pool of 170 volunteers from different European countries, who support immediate relief efforts after disasters. Furthermore, a trainee programme has been set up, offering newcomers a chance to start working in the humanitarian sector at field level.

Our involvement in this pilot project therefore links our existing efforts with new opportunities and developments. We are excited to be part of promoting the idea of volunteerism, learning from each other and creating synergies between our existing programme, the pilot project initiative and its participating partners. Through exploring the Voluntary Corps, Johanniter also wants to contribute to the development of the humanitarian sector, joining forces with other organizations

Through this cooperation, Johanniter is interested to be part of developing and testing the implementation of the Voluntary Corps programme. For years, Johanniter has relied on a close partnership with DG ECHO, VOICE and other networks. This pilot project offers a possibility to contribute in a truly European humanitarian aid operation. Johanniter is therefore supporting the identification, selection, and training of volunteers. We are proud that some of the first Voluntary Corps pilot deployments will be to Johanniter's own field offices in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Haiti and Indonesia.

Sara Allkämper, Sandra Lorenz and Sabine Lurz, Department for International Assistance, Johanniter, www.juh.de



LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS IN HUMANITARIAN AID

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*'The poor man
who enters into a
partnership with one
who is rich makes
a risky venture.'*
(Plautus)

★ In 2010/2011, a combination of factors has resulted in increasing humanitarian needsⁱ. As a result, there is even greater need to pool resources and skills together to ensure maximum efficiency of aid through quality partnerships. Recent publicationsⁱⁱ highlight some of the challenges associated with adopting a partnership approach in rapid-onset emergencies, as coordination is often chaotic and effective communication may be challenging. Some stress the challenge of engaging with local partners in a principled manner when there is real pressure to raise individual agency profiles to generate resources from the public or from donors.ⁱⁱⁱ

The term "partnership" is often used to refer to different types of relationships, either formal (i.e. legal contract) or informal (state of being a partner). By local partnerships, we mean a form of cooperation between international and local actors whereby two NGOs decide to pool funding, skills, and other resources, to achieve a common goal. The question is how can international NGOs maximise the benefits of building local partnerships and what are the challenges associated with interacting with local partners?

★ VIEWS FROM LOCAL PARTNERS

As part of the "Listening Project", Dayna Brown has gathered the perspectives of local people on what has worked well, what has not, and what can be done to make international aid more effective and more accountable.^{iv} Based on this study, it appears that local organisations often feel that there is a lack of respect and appreciation for their knowledge and contribution, and that they are rarely involved in decision-making processes with their international partners. Also, donors and international aid agencies are frequently concerned with delivering aid and spending money quickly, and in this haste they do not spend enough time identifying good local partners and maintaining effective relationships with them.^v

According to the results of the "Listening Project", the balance between trust and control is also important when trying to maintain effective partnerships. When international partners arrive for unannounced visits, their local partners may think it is because they are not trusted. Having effective monitoring systems in place does not have to reflect a lack of confidence or diminish the spirit of partnership. Furthermore, even if

partnerships begin during emergencies, partners need to approach their relationships with a long-term view and greater consistency. Even in the midst of an emergency, it is possible to build the capacity of local partners, but often there is little time - and sometimes little funding - to focus on it successfully.

★ VIEWS OF INTERNATIONAL AID WORKERS

Islamic Relief asked some staff members to reflect on their experience with local partners. According to their responses, it appears that local partners are often more aware and knowledgeable about the status and living conditions of beneficiaries. At the same time, some partners may not have the capacity, access, and even local knowledge they claim. There may also be issues related to compliance with national regulations including registration. There is a need to make sure that local partners are neither subject to local pressures nor associated with any partisan leanings (e.g. tribe, party, class, etc. - to the exclusion of others). In the post-2001 context, it is of increased importance for Muslim NGOs as well as others to ensure stringent background checks for any terrorist connections.

International NGOs could benefit greatly from creating a database and shared institutional memory on acceptable local partners. It would also be useful to develop standard checklists to make quicker decisions about whether or not to enter a partnership in emergency contexts. Local NGOs also increasingly expect their international partners to invest more time and resources in building their capacity. In this respect, organizations like the Humanitarian Forum^{vi}, a network uniting humanitarian organisations from the west and from the Muslim countries, could serve as a model to build bridges and support better partnerships in aid delivery.

Sarah Douik
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<http://www.islamic-relief.org.uk/>

ⁱ "Global Humanitarian Context in 2011 (ECHO Strategy)", reliefweb.int/node/378892

ⁱⁱ Allen, R. (2011) "Partnerships in rapid-onset emergencies: insights from Pakistan and Haiti", *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine* 50, www.odihpn.org/report.asp?id=3217

ⁱⁱⁱ Knudsen, C. (2011) "Partnership in principle, partnership in practice", *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine* 50

^{iv} Brown, D. (2011) "Building effective partnerships: local views", *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine* 50

^v *Ibid.*

^{vi} www.humanitarianforum.org

CLIMATE-SMART DISASTER RISK REDUCTION - A NEW PARTNERSHIP FOR RESILIENCEⁱ

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'Disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation need to be combined with ecosystem management and restoration in order to significantly boost people's resilience'

★ Natural and man-made disasters have increased exponentially over the past decades, with climate change contributing to extreme weather events. Disasters wipe out hard-won gains in poverty reduction and service provision. Degradation and loss of ecosystems have also intensified hazards which, when combined with vulnerability, cause disasters. But these impacts were rarely, if ever, addressed in a coordinated way in the same programme.

To improve this situation, in 2010 five Netherlands-based humanitarian/development and environmental organisations have formed an alliance, the "Partners for Resilience" (PfR) alliance, to reduce the impact of hazards on vulnerable communities. Those organisations are the Netherlands Red Cross, CARE Netherlands, Cordaidⁱⁱ, the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, and Wetlands International.

The vision of the PfR alliance is that disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation (CCA) need to be combined with ecosystem management and restoration (EMR), in order to significantly boost people's resilience - people's ability to withstand present and future shocks in their environment - and that this is critical to help them escape from poverty. With co-funding from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the transcontinental PfR programme entitled "Climate-Smart Disaster Risk Reduction" (2011-2015) will make this vision a reality in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Mali, Guatemala, Nicaragua, India, Indonesia and the Philippines.

★ AIMS AND STRATEGIES OF THE PROGRAMME

The PfR alliance will work both with people in the countryside and with urban slum-dwellers, in areas with disaster risk and environmental degradation aggravated by climate change. The focus is on three key areas:

1. *Strengthening community resilience*, working on disaster preparedness and early warning, livelihood security, poverty reduction, preventing environmental degradation and protection of water resources. Adding to household-level measures, the PfR will engage in EMR to ensure the resilience of landscapes too.
2. *Empowering civil society organisations (CSOs)* working on DRR, and strengthening cooperation between government, knowledge centres and non-governmental actors.
3. The PfR alliance seeks to create a policy context which is more conducive to DRR, CCA and EMR at the local, national and international level through policy dialogue.

★ CHALLENGES OF THIS NEW PARTNERSHIP

Bearing in mind that implementation began only in 2011, some of the challenges seen so far are:

- It takes time to start working as a partnership. It requires discussions on key topics and approaches as well as joint decisions on strategies, objectives, methodologies, focus countries and funds.
- Organisations working on DRR, CCA and/or EMR use different tools; those have to be shared, so that everyone understands them and good joint programme activities can be formulated, including new knowledge.
- For proper monitoring and evaluation, all members of the PfR alliance need to use common methods and formats for reporting; these need to be developed.

★ BENEFITS OF THE PFR PARTNERSHIP

- The core value and benefit of the PfR partnership is its possibility for innovation: "A survey we did in southern Ethiopia showed that climate change impacts were killing livestock and increasing poverty and food shortages. The PfR alliance is the first chance we have to integrate environmental work in those areas, like river basin management, with disaster risk reduction."ⁱⁱⁱ
- In the focus countries, cooperation between relevant civilian and governmental actors will be intensified for *mutual learning and better impact* of the programme.
- In order to *make the institutional environment more conducive to ecosystem-based DRR and CCA*, dialogue between the government, civil society, private sector and knowledge centres will be promoted. These PfR's country-based activities will be supplemented by a global strategy to disseminate experiences and ensure achievements are sustained and replicated.
- Combining three extensive global networks on humanitarian and development work (Red Cross Red Crescent, Caritas Internationalis/ Cordaid, and CARE) with the technical and specialist knowledge and advocacy experience of Wetlands International and the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, will produce a comprehensive approach to DRR, climate adaptation and environmental protection. Therefore best practices on 'climate-smart DRR' coming from this programme could be applied by other like-minded organisations.

"What is special about this programme is the inclusion of ecosystem management in humanitarian and DRR work in the face of a changing climate. There will always be extreme weather, but the disasters it generates can be mitigated if we make sure ecosystems are as strong as they can be^{iv}". In this way the PfR programme^v will contribute to increased disaster resilience.

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ⁱ This article is based on the brochure of the 'Partners for Resilience' alliance (May 2011)

ⁱⁱ Catholic Organization for Relief & Development Aid

ⁱⁱⁱ Quote from Cordaid's DRR policy advisor, Sasja Kamil

^{iv} Quote from Pieter van Eijk of Wetlands International

^v For more information, please contact Mrs Sasja Kamil (DRR policy advisor and PfR coordinator) via sasja.kamil@cordaid.nl

PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN NGOS AND UN AGENCIES: BEYOND THE WORDS

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'If we want the humanitarian community to be fit to operate effectively and meet the needs of the affected population, the commitment to the principles of partnership between the UN and NGOs has to go beyond words.'

★ The scale and dramatic images of recent disasters such as the Tsunami (2005), Haiti earthquake (2010), Pakistan floods (2010) and Horn of Africa (2011) have led to increased scepticism about humanitarian actors' capacity to better coordinate assistance to disaster-affected populations. Despite major progress, the public perception of uncoordinated humanitarian assistance remains prevalent and the sector continues to be judged mainly on its response to highly mediated crises. This perception has been also fed by the conclusions of numerous field evaluation reports.

Success in improving humanitarian response relies heavily on the relationship between two major actors: the United Nations agencies and NGOs. Both play a prominent role in delivering humanitarian assistance, in addition to the Red Cross, governments, local communities and donors.

★ "COMPLEMENTARITY" RATHER THAN COMPETITION

The UN works to orchestrate the best possible humanitarian environment of intervention. In particular UNOCHAⁱ has a vital role in convening coordination forums, developing cluster strategies and being the principal interlocutor of the humanitarian community with host governments. Effective UN leadership is thus critical for the collective success of the humanitarian community and needs to be supported and strengthened.

NGOs on the other hand do what they are best at: delivering assistance to individuals and communities. Due to their operational capacity, engagement with local communities, quick decision-making processes, highly mobile teams and less bureaucratic procedures, NGOs are often the first actors to engage in relief activities. Their commitment to principles, such as independence, non-discrimination and neutrality, enables them to transcend geographical, political and administrative boundaries and get access to the most vulnerable populations. Also in the immediate aftermath of a crisis and in early recovery planning and implementation, NGOs remain crucial actors.

Marrying these comparative strengths into a coherent and efficient action (as opposed to cultivating competition) has been a major challenge for years, but it is essential for effective aid.

★ THE PRINCIPLES ON PAPER VERSUS THE REALITY

The need to work better together has been recognised by both the UN and NGOs and efforts have been made to set groundwork for it. At the Global Humanitarian Platform in July 2007, leaders of UN agencies, INGOs, national NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement came together

to endorse the **Principles of Partnership (PoP)**ⁱⁱ. They agreed to base their relationship with each other on the principles of equality, transparency, a results-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity, and to implement these principles throughout their own organisations.

Significant progress has been achieved, but major gaps between stated intentions and reality still remain. Humanitarian partnership will be more effective, achieve significant results and reach more people in need, once a higher quality of coordination, better and fairer funding arrangements and the de-politicisation of aid is achieved.

★ COORDINATION MEETING OR A TRIBUNE FOR SELF-PROMOTION?

Good coordination is a massive task which can only work if all parties involved do their share of work so every organisation should be made more accountable for its contribution to overall coordination. Moreover, building a solid ground for an effective partnership in coordination requires trust. However, trust is too often undermined by organisational interests and agendas, poor coordination meetings, self-promotion, unwillingness to coordinate and a "planting the flag" approach. Coordination meetings are commonly used for mere information exchange, with each organisation promoting its own activities. Instead, cluster meetingsⁱⁱⁱ should be used for planning, identifying gaps, resources management and risk mitigation. They need a solid agenda with fewer but clearer topics leading to productive discussions led by a strong and respected chairperson. Moreover, decentralised coordination mechanisms could be more effective than national ones; they would gather fewer organisations but with greater knowledge of the local area, and discussions would be more precise and adapted to populations' needs.

★ CHANNELLING FUNDS THROUGH FEWER ENTITIES CREATES... BOTTLENECKS AND CONGESTION

The humanitarian sector is highly competitive and with an increasing number of crises and expectations for large scale responses, getting funds is subject to fierce competition. The trend over the past decade towards the consolidation of humanitarian funding streams into shared, centralised funding mechanisms has theoretically simplified the process of project funding for all actors involved. In practice, these mechanisms (such as Pooled Funds, Common Humanitarian Funds, consolidated appeals, etc.) are often UN-led and UN centric and result in a very unbalanced share of resources between partners- even if some

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‘Better transparency, fairer contractual conditions and streamlining of decision-making during emergencies would lead to a timely provision of assistance’

of these did make some progress in improving operational coordination and donor alignment. Donors should thus push for more transparent and accountable funding arrangements driven by results, leading to better UN-NGO partnership.

Real application of the principle of equality in partnership is essential. In administering these funds, the UN should ensure that prioritisation and allocation is based on the assessed capability of actors to deliver aid effectively. Currently funding is often perceived as going straight to UN agencies at levels disproportionate to their own implementation capabilities, rather than valuing and utilising NGOs’ presence and capacity.

In addition, these mechanisms are often not adapted to the timeliness needed for sudden onset disasters. While channelling most of the funds through a few entities may be perceived as reducing administrative costs, it also creates bottlenecks in funding allocation. The UN’s performance in administering funds to NGOs has proved extremely problematic, with rigid systems, slow-moving decisions, requirements not adapted to emergencies and incoherence between countries, with country representatives developing their own interpretations of procedures. It can take months before a contract is signed with no retroactive eligibility of costs, leaving the NGO either to bear the financial risk or, as is very often the case, leading to a delay in assistance to the populations in need.

Lastly, there are inconsistencies between costs that the UN fund for themselves but do not want to fund for NGOs (e.g. expat salaries), which also contribute to a strong feeling of unfairness among NGOs. These issues could easily be addressed by better transparency, fairer contractual conditions and streamlining of decision-making during emergencies, leading to a timely provision of assistance.

★ **THERE CANNOT BE PARTNERSHIP WITH POLITICISED AID**

Finally and potentially most importantly, a good partnership relies on mutual respect and acceptance of differences.

Working in conflict situations is extremely challenging. NGOs have to negotiate with armed groups to get access to the populations that need assistance. These negotiations are often very difficult- certainly because the word ‘humanitarian’ is not always positively perceived as many military and political interventions are described as ‘humanitarian’. Certainly in these difficult contexts, the respect of an NGO to key principles such as independence and neutrality can prove critical to the acceptance of the NGO on the group’s territory.

ACF thus advocates strongly for a separation between political and humanitarian agendas. In contrast, the UN has embarked on an “integrated approach” in some countries, with the aim of streamlining peace support processes and channel all UN resources towards one common goal. This implies that there are strong links between political, military and other UN components, leading to a perception of politicised aid (using aid for geopolitical and security purposes rather than saving lives). This UN integrated approach puts a lot of pressure on the UN-NGO partnership, particularly in contexts like Somalia. After all, to ally with a politically perceived organisation in these highly politicised contexts does not help to improve acceptance by all conflict parties and might well result in increased security risks for the NGO teams on the ground. In these circumstances, a close operational partnership between UN and NGOs is simply not possible. On the other hand, whilst independence is critical, too much distinctiveness should not prevent coordination in another context where partnership is possible.

In this sense, UNOCHA’s role becomes even more important: they need to prevent the politicisation of aid and defend the respect of humanitarian principles.

★ **CONCLUSION**

NGOs and UN agencies need to better embrace their differences and understand that it is precisely these comparative advantages that will contribute to coherent, flexible and effective humanitarian responses. Diversity should be accepted, nurtured and promoted to create optimal conditions for a quality humanitarian assistance adapted to each population’s needs and not dictated by some organisations’ particular expertise or public relations’ objectives.

If we want the humanitarian community to be fit to operate effectively and meet the needs of affected populations, the commitment to the Principles of Partnership between the UN and NGOs has to go beyond words; a great step forward would be achieved with higher quality coordination driven by results, a review of funding arrangements, and a clear stand for a de-politicisation of aid.

Then ultimately the effectiveness of international humanitarian aid and its perception by the media, public opinion and most importantly by local communities will gain in confidence and trust.

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ⁱ The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

ⁱⁱ www.globalhumanitarianplatform.org/pop

ⁱⁱⁱ In follow-up of the evaluation of the tsunami response, it was decided to set up clusters in crises affected countries to improve coordination between agencies working in the same sector (e.g. health, shelter etc.).

PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN NGOS AND INSTITUTIONAL DONORS

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'In the field or at Brussels HQ level, DG ECHO technical advisers and NGOs share the same objective and speak the same language.'

★ In 2005, the United Nations initiated its humanitarian reform process to improve the effectiveness of the global aid system - notably during major crises such as the tsunami in South East Asia in 2004. It launched a "three pillars" strategy based on coordination, funding and the cluster approach. Participating NGOs decided to further this reform process by adding a fourth pillar which included the five "principles of partnership": equality, transparency, result-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity. These principles were approved by UN agencies, NGOs and Red Cross at the 2007 Global Humanitarian Platform.

The concept of "partnership" has been mentioned so many times over the past years in the context of multilateral cooperation, from European Union meetings (DG ECHO¹, DG Devco/ EuropeAid²) to United Nations or bilateral consultations, that in many ways it has lost its essential meaning. Used in a simplistic way, it tends to conceal the down-to-earth reality which has to take into account financial dependency.

However with a reasonable amount of idealism, we may consider that partnerships between NGOs and institutional donors are not just about organisations looking for money and donors happy to "give it away"; and that humanitarian aid is not necessarily driven by the political interests of the institution, whether it is a state or an international organisation. This article takes a specific look at how this applies to the relationship of the European Commission with its NGO humanitarian aid partners.

★ PARTNERSHIP ACCORDING TO DG ECHO

The humanitarian aid department of the European Commission, DG ECHO, is one of the most important donors of humanitarian aid, with more than 1 billion euro spent via "partners" in 2010. Since 1992, DG ECHO has been signing Framework Partnership Agreements (FPA) with selected organisations that implement humanitarian aid. Its cooperation relationships are currently regulated by the 4th such FPA.

The FPA connects DG ECHO and its potential partners by laying out the key aspects of partnership. It emphasises the nature of the bond between these parties and describes their relationship. It gives precision on what should be expected from such a partnership. According to the FPA, "...the Parties undertake to promote and consolidate their relationship and their co-operation by ensuring that each one knows

and respects the mandates, charters or statutes of the other and by recognising the specificity of each other's contribution to the humanitarian action. Parties carry out their roles in the execution of actions funded by the European Union preserving their freedom and autonomy and assuming their responsibilities..."

If we focus on terminology, a partnership is "an arrangement where parties agree to cooperate to advance their mutual interests". The FPA underlines the notions of equality and respect between partners and includes the idea of common interest.

"...RECOGNISING THE SPECIFICITY OF EACH OTHER'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE HUMANITARIAN ACTION..."

In general, most models of cooperation over the past 25 years have been based on the concept of relations rooted in recognition of each other's specificity and role. Ideas around what partners should or should not share as a result are fundamentally influenced by the fact that the donor does not intervene in the field as an implementing agency.

DG ECHO goes beyond this principle: the partner that benefits from ECHO funding must operate on the field without intermediates. Therefore DG ECHO does not participate in the United Nations "pooled funds" which first collects funds in a centralised 'pot' to be allocated at a later stage.

These core principles and the FPA as a regulatory document give a certain legitimacy to the relation of partnership between NGOs and DG ECHO. Everyone's role is clearly defined. The funding entity and the implementing agency share a common objective: bringing relief to the most vulnerable populations. In the field or at Brussels HQ level, DG ECHO technical advisers and NGOs share the same objective and speak the same language. This common representation of aid is further reinforced by the fact that many ECHO staff members have previously worked in NGOs. Assisted by partners' analyses, ECHO also publicly raises awareness of affected populations' needs, both in massive natural disasters or in forgotten crises.

Keeping a balanced partnership is not possible without each actor showing mutual respect and trying to understand the other's position and approach to humanitarian aid. DG ECHO is not a "cash machine" and its partners recognise that ECHO staff do their best to comply with the "humanitarian principles" defined in the

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‘Constant dialogue and negotiations over practical implementation of rules lead to an ECHO-NGO partnership that has real implications for practice in the field.’

Good Humanitarian Donorship initiativeⁱⁱⁱ, signed in 2003. On the other hand, ECHO must allow NGOs to keep their right of initiative, i.e. to elaborate propositions of interventions corresponding to their own organisation's mandate and strategy, to maintain these positive dynamics.

Institutional donor funding is essential. But a donor's role is not limited to bringing money to the table. Even NGOs that benefit from substantial funding from private donors due to strong marketing strategies may benefit from working with public donors to broaden their scope of action and increase their technical knowledge, as donors have high standards and can give expert assistance. In addition to funding and expertise, signing a contract with a major donor such as the European Union ensures NGOs significant visibility. After all, donor departments work in close cooperation with political representatives in other departments that may be receptive to the advocacy efforts of NGOs. As such, the donor's political and financial influence increases the impact of the message that NGOs want to spread. These direct relations with influential institutional donors are thus necessary for NGOs to avoid getting isolated in the humanitarian sphere- however, at the same time, NGOs should make sure not to become dependent on grants from these donors through an imbalanced relationship.

While this article focuses on DG ECHO as a donor, the FPA scheme is obviously not the only partnership model that exists. Other structures of action may emerge. Donors may act as implementing agencies themselves for example, as UN agencies do in practice when they allocate pooled funding to their own operations.

★ CONSULTATION LEADING TO IMPROVEMENTS AND REAL PARTNERSHIP

Of course building and maintaining a partnership can be quite resource intense, requiring time, commitment and systematic exchange of information. Partnership relations may have an administrative burden for both sides, a fact which DG ECHO acknowledges, but which could still be addressed further. While European donors, including the Commission, agreed in the 2007 European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid to “continue efforts to streamline and simplify procedures for humanitarian aid in order to reduce the administrative burden on implementing organizations”^{iv}, in practice NGOs have seen a continued increase in information requirements

associated with running ECHO-funded projects. ECHO remains the donor widely considered by NGOs to be the most difficult to work with in terms of administrative requirements, a fact which can be a barrier to accessing funding for some potential implementing partners, and is potentially an impediment to the efficiency of aid delivery.

Of course, there are some positives to administrative rigour required by donors. For example the regular in-depth audits (as required for each ECHO project) can help to improve the partners' modes of action. Beyond the financial disallowances of their audited grants, the recommendations audits issue may be considered as contributions towards supporting organisations to optimise their managing processes.

The practical implementation of the partnership is discussed in a working group, namely the “FPA Watch Group”. This working group currently gathers thirty-nine European NGO ECHO partners under VOICE's facilitation and is the ideal lab to explore the functioning of the “partnership”. Through this recognised structure of cooperation and dialogue, the “Framework Partnership Agreement” becomes tangible, as constant dialogue and negotiations over practical implementation of rules lead to an ECHO-NGO partnership that has real implications for practice in the field. While, as in any partnership, the outcomes may be a compromise between the requests of either party, still the possibility to operate in a culture of partnership can bring satisfaction rather than pessimism and frustration (which can be linked to a no-dialogue situation).

The ECHO model is crucial, not only because ECHO is an important humanitarian donor worldwide but also because the model can be transposed and adapted by member states to structure their own approach to bilateral aid.

Partnership entails that the donor and the NGO are both willing to go along the same road which entails more than just finance. It takes efforts from both sides to maintain the spirit of partnership but it clearly contributes to better aid for the affected populations.

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ⁱ DG ECHO is the humanitarian aid department of the European Commission.

ⁱⁱ DG DEVCO is the development aid department of the European Commission.

ⁱⁱⁱ www.goodhumanitarianandonorship.org

^{iv} European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, article 94.

PARTNERSHIP WITH SPANISH DECENTRALISED DONORS FOR HUMANITARIAN AID

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'For Intermón Oxfam, working with decentralized donors provides an excellent opportunity to advocate for critical humanitarian issues as well as to diversify our potential donors'



"Decentralised Cooperation" is the name for the ODA (Official Development Assistance) which is managed by Spanish public administrations other than the central government. In practice, these are the 17 administrative regions of Spain (called Autonomous Communities, ACs) as well as other lower levels of administration (city councils, provincial delegations, etc.).

In the 80's, decentralised cooperation only accounted for 2% of all of Spanish ODA. This proportion increased significantly following civil society lobbying in 1995 in support of the allocation of 0.7% of the Gross Domestic Product to international cooperation.

Currently, Spain is the country with the highest rate of decentralised aid in their total ODA in comparison to other OECD-DACⁱ members. Moreover, the decentralised administrations channel the greatest percentage of their ODA through NGOs (66% from ACs and 52% of lower levels of administration, versus 6% from the central Spanish governmentⁱⁱ). However, this tendency has been disrupted in recent years due to the economic crisis, which has led many ACs to decrease or, in some cases, even suspend this support.

For Intermón Oxfam, working with decentralized donors provides an excellent opportunity to advocate for critical humanitarian issues (e.g. impact of climate change on vulnerable populations, forgotten crises, need for disaster preparedness), as well as to diversify our potential donors. To qualify for this kind of decentralised funding, the NGO must be actively present in the autonomous or municipal territories, which an organisation like Intermón Oxfam is able to guarantee.

However, this diversification of donors requires a big effort from the NGOs in terms of management due to the multitude of geographical and thematic priorities as well as different regulations and formats imposed by each administration. Thanks to the coordinated work of various stakeholders in the sector, certain initiatives have been created in recent years to unify criteria.

Some areas still need further improvement thoughⁱⁱⁱ, such as the lack of flexibility in the funding granted by decentralised donors. Many

of the calls for humanitarian aid (HA) follow the same principle of competitive tendering as development, with specific deadlines and strict requirements in proposal development and expenditure justification, despite being projects that are very different in nature and which need quicker responses. There are, however, also good examples with regards to funding amounts and flexibility, such as the Basque government, the Catalan government and the Castile La Mancha government. The first two have developed long-term agreements for HA, which can finance a predefined framework for action in the case of an emergency occurs.

In general, there is a need to increase budget allocation for HA activities. Political will for this exists, so as a general rule, most decentralized donors establish a percentage of the annual development cooperation budget to go to HA (usually 7%-10%). In practice though, they don't always meet these percentages. Moreover, in the current economic crisis, the budget cuts in HA are deeper (37% less in 2009 than in 2008) than in development (4% decrease in the same period)^{iv}.

For Intermón Oxfam^v, HA is a priority area of our work, with permanent teams in 9 countries (Chad, Sudan, Ethiopia, Burkina, Ecuador, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua and Paraguay) responsible for programmes supporting interventions water & sanitation, food security and disaster preparedness. Between 2007 and 2011, an average of 10 million € per year has been dedicated to HA, which came from national and international institutional funders, with the longterm trend being upward. On average 12% of the funding in this period came from Decentralised Cooperation. Faced with the current difficult financial situation and relying on constant communication with the decentralized donors, our efforts are now focused on working with them to improve their understanding of the challenges and limits of HA and thus on improving the tools of Decentralised Cooperation for financing HA.

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ⁱ Development Assistance Committee

ⁱⁱ Report from the NGDO Coordinator – España sobre el sector de las ONGD. Madrid, CONGDE, 2010

ⁱⁱⁱ La iniciativa de la GHD en la Cooperación Descentralizada. Madrid, Intermón Oxfam and IECAH, 2010.

^{iv} La acción humanitaria en 2009-2010: en esas estábamos cuando tembló Haití. Madrid, IECAH, 2010.

^v Intermón Oxfam is a member of the Oxfam Humanitarian Consortium.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FROM SCRATCH: COOPERATION BETWEEN RELIEF ORGANISATIONS AND PRIVATE PARTNERS IN A POST-CONFLICT AREA. AN EXAMPLE FROM NORTHERN UGANDA.

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‘Willing to use each others’ strengths for the benefit of returning IDPs, ZOA and MWH had to overcome quite some differences in the way of working.’

★ *“An entrepreneur is a man of enterprise. But where to start when there is nothing to start with? Many refugees and IDPsⁱ find themselves in such a situation.”* Hans Joosse, social investor and founder of the MWH Foundation in the Netherlands, has a long term commitment to Northern Uganda. *“I believe that economic development is the only way for sustainable poverty eradication.”* That is how ZOA, a Dutch NGO, and MWH, a Dutch foundation supporting sustainable economic development in East Africa, found each other in 2007. The starting point for both MWH and ZOA was that economic development is a prerequisite as well as a stimulus for regaining stability. Willing to use each others’ strengths for the benefit of returning IDPs, they had to overcome quite some differences in the way of working.

★ SUPPORTING IDP RETURN

To facilitate the return of IDPs to their original home areas in Northern Uganda, ZOA started programmes supporting food security, water and sanitation as well as education. ZOA also implemented a ‘voucher for work’ programme, in which groups of farmers did community work and received vouchers for agricultural inputs in return. These farmer groups formed the basis for the AgriBusiness Chain Development programme developed together by ZOA and MWHⁱⁱ. The focus was on enhancing productivity and facilitating market entry through a “farmer field school” approach. An important element of the approach is that people develop themselves, instead of being developed by ‘western charities’ - which excludes free hand-outs to these groups. Given the post-conflict situation, extra attention was paid to social themes like conflict resolution, leadership and mutual trust. MWH’s and ZOA’s different expertise were complementary for such a project.

Out of these farmer groups some commercial farmers are already emerging. Since ZOA has no mandate to ‘go commercial’, MWH decided to divide the programme in two: continuing with ZOA, focusing on smallholders in a food security programme, but also with MWH Uganda Trust, focusing on commercial farmers. In 2011, a small group of 87 farmers, the ‘early adopters’, started to work towards commercial farming, and this group now already expanded to 173 members. The programme is still developing, currently working on a service centre for commercial farming. The early adopters are positive examples for other farmers - gaining knowledge, experiencing working with different crops, cooperating in storage and marketing, etc. All of this contributes to better income for families and more stable communities.

★ CHALLENGES OF WORKING TOGETHER

Aiming at supporting economic development for people coming straight from IDP camps was not often done before, so it meant a search for the appropriate approach. Bi-annual evaluations resulted in timely adjustments to the programme if necessary. From the perspective of an NGO these evaluations were certainly a challenge, demanding considerable flexibility from field staff as well as a lot of follow-up afterwards in explanation.

The challenges of the cooperation between the two parties were not so much in the technical aspects, but rather in the ways of work. For example, the private partner wanted to proceed fast, which sometimes proved not to be effective, while the NGO wanted to oversee all community issues and avoid risks, resulting in slowing the pace. This caused friction now and then. As they were not always aware of these differences, it took a lot of time until true common understanding was reached. In this respect, the evaluation meetings were also instrumental.

★ COMPLEMENTARY STRENGTHS

ZOA’s experience in providing basic services created the circumstances for people to return to their homesteads, and the experience in community work provided a starting point for agriculture from scratch.

There was a strong emphasis on learning, made possible by MWH funding: staff were told to do anything in the best possible way, even if it came at a financial cost. This is contradictory to other projects which usually have to keep costs to a minimum.

The long term commitment of MWH is very positive. There is no fixed end date, contrary to the fixed duration of grants that NGOs usually have to work with. Beneficiaries saw the same people returning again and again, which built up trust and motivation. Last but not least, MWH is willing to stay as long as needed, and in doing so, will make it easier for ZOA to exit the area when stability in the region has returned.

So certainly, if two parties succeed in overcoming differences in mindset, the best of both worlds can come togetherⁱⁱⁱ.

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ⁱ Internally Displaced Persons

ⁱⁱ Linked to the agriculture-for-development agenda in the World Bank Development Report 2008

ⁱⁱⁱ For more information, please contact Ewout Suithoff (Head of Fundraising, Education and Communication Department at ZOA) at e.suithoff@zoa.nl

INTERVIEW WITH KRISTALINA GEORGIEVA

VIEW ON THE EU

Kristalina Georgieva became the EU Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response in the beginning of 2010. She has been very active in this portfolio during her first year, leading to the unprecedented honour of being named European Commissioner of the year as well as European of the year¹.

This interview by Inge Brees (VOICE) took place in the Commissioner's office on 15 September 2011.

- **Everybody talks about partnership. What does partnership mean for you?**

The power of partnership is that it makes the whole bigger than the sum of its parts. In the humanitarian field that means that fewer people die and suffer from conflicts and disasters because together we are better equipped to meet the needs of the affected people. Partnership means that we work so well together that we can anticipate tragedies and when a disaster does hit, we deploy to relieve people's suffering. The world is changing in the direction of more frequent disasters and at the same time resources are not growing fast enough and that makes the question of partnership even more important to us.

- **DG ECHOⁱⁱ works with humanitarian partners. How do you see the relationship between NGOs and DG ECHO?**

I have been very fortunate to have seen the activities of our NGO and UN partners in many places around the world. Seeing our partners' work has demonstrated beyond any doubt the value of diversity of partners because no conflict, no disaster is the same. In different environments different partners have comparative advantages, because they have been on the ground for a long time and they have adapted themselves to the local conditions. For example, in the south of Kyrgyzstan fighting erupted between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, in an area where not a lot of NGOs were active. But ACTED and ICRC were present. They were already there, working with local communities and they had their trust. As a result, they were able to help the affected people within a day.

Last year alone we in ECHO, through our partners, have touched the lives of 140 million people in their most dire moment of need. We have been able to do this only because we have this family of nearly 200 partners and they can be activated overnight, they can increase their work when the call comes. The diversity of ECHO partners is what makes ECHO capable of making a fast response to crisis and disasters around the world.

- **Any major crisis, like Libya, requires coordination within the European Commission and with the European External Action Service (EEAS), especially**

- with Commissioner Piebalgs and HR Ashton. Given that the EEAS has been operational for almost a year now, how has the coordination developed over time?**

There is a positive trend in the coordination. With every crisis we build the body of precedents that demonstrates how we can protect the neutrality, impartiality and independence of humanitarian aid and how at the same time we can have a coordination mechanism that allows the delivery to be more effective. The Libya crisis was a very good example. In Libya the ECHO humanitarian team was the first to be in Benghazi, Misrata and Tripoli. We dealt with the humanitarian aspects of the crisis and for the political side there was a crisis platform.

We made our own decisions independently but shared our notes with the crisis platform. We can see this working very well now also in Horn of Africa. I am very much aware that people were anxious in the beginning to know how the coordination would work but I can see genuinely that we have retained the humanitarian principles. I would appreciate if VOICE and the NGO community would continue to observe the developments and would give us feedback as the process of setting up the EEAS continues.

With Commissioner Piebalgs we have excellent relations. We have set our eyes on two priorities for cooperation: Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development and Disaster Risk Reduction. I must say that this engagement between the humanitarian world and the development world is long overdue. In my heart I believe that we owe it to people to be more effective in bringing relief and development. We have to invest more in resilience, because the only way we can reduce humanitarian suffering in the future, is by helping communities to be more resilient to disasters and conflicts. There is no other way.

- **There are increasingly calls for reaching out to other actors which can be involved in disaster response, such as civil protection, the military and the private sector. How far should we go in our engagement?**

A decision has been made to bring together humanitarian aid and civil protection in one institutional arrangement within the Commission. It has proven to be the right decision because it allows us to bring help in

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a more efficient manner. Last year this was demonstrated in the Pakistan floods and this year in the Libya crisis.

These crises have shown us that there can be compatibility between the two, provided that we are mindful of different skills and comparative advantages. We have a very strong body of humanitarian expertise in the Commission and there has not been even a hint of a risk that civil protection could somehow overtake the principled approach to humanitarian aid. On the contrary, what we have seen is that the principled approach to humanitarian aid is the platform on which we provide in-kind assistance from the civil protection side as well.

A more complex environment which involves military participation is trickier. But so far we have succeeded in Europe in retaining the principled approach. Take the Libya case as an example; an EUFORⁱⁱⁱ operation was conceptualized but with a very clear conditionality that it would only be activated if OCHA^{iv} called for it, and OCHA did not. But we have to recognise that there are, and there will be, cases where military assets are necessary either to help with relief efforts or with protection, or both. The military engagement can only work if it is under civilian oversight and if OCHA's mandate is retained. In Europe, the majority of Member States have a very mature approach to the role of the military and I am very impressed by our defence ministers. The vast majority of them are genuinely convinced that in a humanitarian crisis, they come as a last resort and they come under the leadership of civilians. It is important for the humanitarian community to praise them when they do this.

• In the framework of the on-going discussions on the long term EU budget, which issues are the most pertinent ones to preserve and to watch?

On the financial side, we clearly need a provision of humanitarian aid that is proportional to needs; and the needs are growing, unfortunately with a speed that we are not able to follow. But even more important is the flexibility we are asking to be built into the Emergency Aid Reserve. We are asking for a bigger cushion, because you never know which disaster may strike, and we are asking for a carry-over of the Reserve for one year into the next. That flexibility of

the reserve would make a huge difference in Europe's capability to respond to needs.

• You have regularly stressed the importance of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), including recently with regards to the famine in the Horn of Africa. Where should DRR funding come from?

We have made a conscious decision to invest a part of our humanitarian budget in DRR because we believe that it is paramount for disaster-prone communities to look at it as a humanitarian issue.

Take the Horn of Africa; there is a community in Kenya where ECHO has invested, collectively with the local authorities and partners, in drought preparedness. This community suffered much less than the others; for example, the acute malnutrition rates among children are half of the level in the neighbouring provinces. So we will continue to do this.

ECHO invests somewhere between 7 and 10 percent of our humanitarian aid budget to disaster preparedness. But we cannot move DRR only with humanitarian money. It is the right thing to do but it is not good enough. The bulk of the money has to come from development and it has to come from the countries themselves.

ⁱ www.europeanvoice.com/article/2010/11/georgieva-named-european-of-the-year/69583.aspx

ⁱⁱ The humanitarian aid department of the European Commission

ⁱⁱⁱ EUFOR stands for European Union Force, which is a generic name for planned or implemented EU military operations.

^{iv} United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

INSECURITY HAMPERS RELIEF AID IN YEMEN

FIELD FOCUS

'The main stake for the humanitarian community today is to regain acceptable security conditions in order to access populations in need.'

Considered as the poorest country of the Arabian peninsula, the Republic of Yemen is composed of strong tribes, between which alliances govern the main power struggle of the country. The severe political destabilization which started at the beginning of 2011 exacerbated existing historic rivalries in this fragile country. The current repression of protestors led by governmental forces is causing very violent clashes with the opposition. The opposition is composed of: 1) youth movements; 2) an important part of the national army which quit the government months agoⁱ; 3) the powerful Hashid tribal federation headed by Sadiq Al-Ahmar; and 4) part of the historical opposition party Al-Islah. Very intense clashes continue at the time of writing, notably in the very centre of the capital Sanaa.

In this destabilised context, the humanitarian situation of the local population is deteriorating month after month. Serious shortages in the cities and the rural areas over the past months have resulted in a strong price increase for basic goods. The restricted access to food products is further amplified by the low production from local farmers this yearⁱⁱ. Some of the civilian population are also direct victims of the insecurity; tens of thousands of new internally displaced persons (IDPs) left their attacked villages, notably in southern Yemen.

Insecurity also threatens the humanitarian community; even if humanitarian organisations do not seem to be targeted as such, they are victims of well-organised armed groups taking advantage of the very unclear situation in the country. In this context the risks for humanitarian workers increase dramatically and most NGOs are not able to develop emergency operations responding to the new humanitarian needs.

Present in the country since 1998, Triangle G H condemns the kidnapping and detention of three of its staff in Hadramout Governorate since 28 May 2011. This major incident obviously reduces the capacity of the organisation to develop new operations in the country- though existing programs are still ongoing, managed by national teams which are supported by Triangle G H staff through remote management.

The main priority for the humanitarian community today is to regain acceptable security conditions in order to access populations in need. However, given the recent spectacular escalation of violence in Sanaa, one can be pessimistic in this regard. In this context, Triangle G H is leading some local assessments in accessible areas in order to be ready to intervene for emergency and/or rehabilitation programs as soon as the security situation allows.

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ⁱ 1st Armoured Division under General Ali Moshen.

ⁱⁱ Rapid food security assessment in Tibama plane: majority of lands not cultivated because of low rains and not even ploughed because of fuel shortages. (Triangle G H, August 2011).

VOICE AT WORK

- ★ **VOICE Board meets with the new Director-General of ECHO** - On July 11 the VOICE Board met with Claus Sørensen, who had just taken up his position. The VOICE Board briefed Mr. Sørensen on VOICE's objectives and priorities and raised attention to improving the coherence of "Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development" activities inside the Commission and better addressing Disaster Risk Reduction in the new EU budget for 2014-2020. The Director General expressed his belief in civil society involvement in developing Community policy and anticipated a productive partnership with the VOICE network.
- ★ **Increasing dialogue with EU member states** - In order to influence EU policies, being active at member state level is essential. In June, Dutch VOICE members and secretariat met with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to exchange on EU humanitarian policy issues, stressing the need for a humanitarian strategy which is linked to the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. VOICE also engages with the humanitarian experts of member states through the Council Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA). During the first six months of the year, VOICE maintained a close dialogue with the Hungarian presidency, who invited VOICE member Oxfam to give a presentation to COHAFA members. Oxfam stressed the need for humanitarian aid to be driven by needs assessments and not by geopolitical or security interests, while the VOICE Director emphasized that future EU humanitarian funding should remain separate from crisis management funding. In July, the Polish presidency invited VOICE to participate in a COHAFA meeting focusing on the rapidly deteriorating crisis in the Horn of Africa. The VOICE Director highlighted the importance of strict adherence to the humanitarian principles to secure the access of humanitarian organisations to the affected populations.
- ★ **Engaging with other humanitarian stakeholders** - VOICE has built up a strong line of contact and regular exchange with other humanitarian actors, fostering common understanding and cooperation in advocacy where relevant. In May, the VOICE Board held its second joint meeting with the Board of ICVA (International Council of Voluntary Agencies) to discuss policy priorities. In April, the VOICE Programme Coordinator spoke at the Brussels launch of the revised Sphere handbook, an event organised by VOICE member Caritas Europa. VOICE emphasized that besides being an essential guide for practitioners in implementing quality humanitarian aid, the handbook is also a useful example for a wider audience of how humanitarian values and principles are operationalised. In addition, the VOICE Secretariat strengthened links with NGOs in Slovenia and Poland. Among the topics discussed were funding and the need for humanitarian advocacy.
- ★ **VOICE organises successful events on resilience and civil protection** - In June, VOICE and its member organisation ActionAid UK organised a well attended event "*From Disaster Risk Reduction to Comprehensive Resilience - Towards a Common Understanding*" in London. The event reflected the growing recognition within the sector that natural disasters are just one of many factors driving vulnerability and that building a comprehensive resilience of communities to the multiple hazards they face is imperative. The event gathered together DRR experts from NGOs, academia, networks and donors.
On the eve of VOICE General Assembly in May, VOICE organised an event "*European Civil Protection: How does it relate to humanitarian aid?*". The presentation and subsequent discussion was highly appreciated by the audience as it offered a great opportunity for humanitarian NGOs and other stakeholders to engage in a fruitful dialogue with ECHO on the role of civil protection in humanitarian crises.
- ★ **Towards a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps** - In July, VOICE launched a new position paper on the Voluntary Corps. Several VOICE member organisations are pleased to be participating in one of the pilot projects for the Corps, in a truly European partnership of different agencies. VOICE welcomes the Council's recognition that the development of the Voluntary Corps should not detract from the Commission's existing humanitarian aid budget, and in particular the emphasis on the need for the Corps to have a clear added value. For more information on the Voluntary Corps, please have a look at the dedicated article in this newsletter.
- ★ **New information sheet highlights VOICE members' commitment to quality** - VOICE's recent information sheet "*Quality in EU Humanitarian Aid - The contribution of the VOICE network*" presents an overview of quality issues and initiatives related to the sector. In the context of increasing humanitarian needs, NGOs remain essential professional actors delivering rapid, flexible, context-appropriate humanitarian aid, and continue to lead the pursuit of ever-higher standards of quality.



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VOICE out loud

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