

*'VOICE OUT LOUD  
is intended to contribute  
to the understanding  
of the professional reality  
of humanitarian NGOs.'*

*From the VOICE Secretariat*

Over the last two decades, the humanitarian NGO sector is continuously striving for professionalism, improving the quality of its work, and becoming more transparent and accountable. As key civilian actors in humanitarian aid, European NGOs are significant in terms of activities and funding. The European Commission alone channels over € 1 billion annually to the countries in need through them. NGOs are also funded by governments of EU Member States and through the generosity and engagement of European citizens.

This newsletter is focusing on transparency and accountability. 'Voicing out' their experiences, European humanitarian actors are touching on some of the different dimensions of this double responsibility. Other humanitarian issues are also being addressed, such as the humanitarian needs in Chechnya, or the issue of European humanitarian volunteers. Finally, the main activities of the VOICE network over the last months are being described.

'VOICE OUT LOUD' is intended to contribute to the understanding of the professional reality of humanitarian NGOs. It is addressed to the European institutions and those interested in the humanitarian community, while giving an inside 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 some 90 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 for the last 12 years and is an independent organisation under Belgian law since 2001.

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## THE END OF ILLUSION

### EDITORIAL



**Those who still believe that there is a genuine separation between humanitarian activities and politics are victims of an illusion. The era of romantic humanitarianism is definitely over.**

In the 60's and 70's, humanitarian NGOs could work while the political powers were showing little interest - if any - in humanitarian issues. This led to a kind of 'splendid isolation'. Emergency activities were being run either totally underground or in negotiation with the local authorities, be they governments in power or rebel leaders.

Western governments became directly involved in humanitarian operations with the end of the Cold War. UN Security Council Resolution 688 on Northern Iraq (Kurdistan) may be seen as an official turning point, making it possible for military troops to be involved as humanitarian actors. This trend went on throughout the conflict in former Yugoslavia and the so called 'humanitarian war' in Kosovo, with additional Security Council Resolutions providing an international legal basis for interventions.

Political and military actors today continue to show great interest in humanitarian crises and the humanitarian field is definitely part of international relations. This situation has led to a serious loss of independence of humanitarian NGOs. Attracted by the financial support of states, some NGOs are even being 'embedded' in governmental bodies.

Humanitarian NGOs are now facing a key strategic challenge: how to be more independent, in order to be able to act exclusively to the benefit of the victims of conflicts? The best possible option would consist of organizing a structured dialogue with political and military actors on the basis of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). This legal framework is a sound basis to discuss a 'reasonable' division of tasks between involved parties. Put roughly, political and military actors would be responsible for peace negotiation and security, and humanitarian NGOs for assistance and protection.

In natural disasters, logistical capacity is an absolute priority and the military are best equipped to provide this, but humanitarian assistance is much more than a mere logistic operation. In conflict situations, where the first priority is the protection of the most vulnerable, the use of military assets must be subordinated to the respect of neutrality. Implementing humanitarian work implies political independence and the respect of the basic principles of IHL.


The attempts of the military to gain ownership on humanitarian aid are a major obstacle to the dialogue with political and military authorities on humanitarian issues. A second obstacle is the fact that some of the most important states are denying IHL fundamentals when their security is at stake. Whereas the main purpose of IHL is to strike a balance between security imperatives and respect for human dignity, the fact that leaders of the 'war against terrorism' are ignoring IHL rules is a serious setback. The most recent negative development of the post '9/11' context is the dangerous suspicion in the minds of some that humanitarian NGOs could be providing direct support to terrorist movements.

The conditions for moving towards a structured dialogue with military and political actors are challenging. This challenge will only be met when the humanitarian community will be able to come up with a unified and coordinated position. The road of common pragmatism is long but it is the only one that will help preserving the core of humanitarianism.

**Paul Grossrieder**  
President of VOICE

## HOW TO DEAL WITH FUNDING FROM THE PUBLIC? THE EXPERIENCE OF HANDICAP INTERNATIONAL

THE ISSUE - TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF HUMANITARIAN NGOS

 **The Tsunami was unprecedented in scale, both in terms of the numbers of countries affected and the number of people killed, maimed or made homeless. The public response it prompted, in parallel, was unprecedented in scale too, bringing the flow of donors' money to a level not seen before. How did NGOs, like Handicap International (HI), respond to this new situation?**

At the start, like many other NGOs, we did not expect such a huge response from the public in the countries in which we are based (Belgium, Canada, Germany, Luxemburg, France, Switzerland and the UK). Our first reaction was to contact our own both private and institutional donor constituencies. In the countries where we are part of a wider national emergency network, we joined nationwide appeals sponsored by the media. The funds collected by these appeals were unexpectedly high. It quickly became clear that these funds were going to be more than what we would be able to use for our emergency work in the tsunami affected countries. After close consultation with all the members of the HI network, we choose to inform our donors and ask them for the permission to divert some of the funds to other emergencies. Where this flexibility was not possible due to our presence within national fundraising bodies, we decided to adopt a long-term approach (5 years), which would allow our emergency work to be followed by rehabilitation and development activities. Good communication was essential to make this message understandable for the public at large. The media responded positively to this approach and helped relaying the message.

As part of an international network, we were able to achieve a good degree of flexibility, honouring our commitments to donors, whenever the strict allocation of funds was not negotiable. At the same time, we could continue our work and deal with forgotten emergencies. In fact, as it is usually the case

in this kind of situation, we were facing the challenge of absorbing the extra funds, while keeping to our existing commitments.

Together with many other NGOs, we experienced a certain degree of 'donor fatigue' in the aftermath of the tsunami appeal. This was especially the case in Belgium, where we are part of an NGO emergency consortium called 'Consortium 12-12' (consisting of the Red Cross, Unicef, Oxfam, Caritas and HI). The tsunami fundraising appeal was so successful - with up to € 53 millions - that donors tended afterwards to give to non-consortium NGOs, believing somehow that consortium members had already received their fair share.

 **BELONGING TO A NATIONAL EMERGENCY CONSORTIUM**

The main advantage of belonging to a national emergency consortium is certainly the guarantee of obtaining good fundraising results by presenting a united and professional front to the media and the public. The collaboration between humanitarian agencies is well perceived by the general public which would hardly understand any competition in this kind of activities. Experience has shown that joint fundraising appeals are more successful than individual appeals, not only in Belgium but also in other countries. Economies of scale are being made by using identical messages, advertising and media channels. This is especially true when the media fully collaborate by giving free space and, as it was the case in Belgium, by organizing a TV event during which most funds were raised.

There is of course another side of the coin in being part of a national emergency fundraising body: the non-flexibility of the funds raised, the so called 'earmarked money'. This 'conditionality of emergency aid' becomes even more problematic when another large catastrophe rapidly follows the previous one, as it has been the case lately with the Kashmir earthquake.

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Does the accountability of the funds raised for the first emergency justify the slow response to the second one? This dilemma is an inherent part of our 'double-constituency' nature. As a NGO, we are accountable to donors but, at the same time, to the people we assist in emergencies in the field. Generally speaking, accountability is considered only in strict financial terms. However, we should consider this concept in a broader perspective, taking into account the accountability of means that we have mobilised for our beneficiaries: the people who are maimed, traumatized and internally displaced in their own countries.

Financial accountability and human accountability are not self excluding and, although it is not always simple, it is possible to strike a good balance between the two. In reality, expectations from donors and from beneficiaries may sometimes differ. For instance, the pressure we have from our donors to spend funds quickly could contrast with some of our beneficiaries' wishes to better take into consideration human rights issues. The example of land dispossession experienced by some beneficiaries after the tsunami catastrophe is quite striking. Protection of rights, - especially those of the more vulnerable ones, including people with disabilities - needs to be fully taken into account when addressing accountability. Emergency work is not a simple task. It is often carried out in complex situations and it is our duty to explain to our donors the difficulties encountered. This is also part of being accountable.



TRANSPARENCY  
AND TRUST

At times, the slow response to emergencies is another disadvantage of being part of a national fundraising consortium. All members have to be contacted, and messages and timing agreed. This process is even slower when there is no internal structure and all initiatives depend on the members themselves. In the case of the '12-12' con-

sortium, the sheer scale of donations has led the members to envisage a stronger structure, which can deal more professionally with financial and communications issues. The slowness of the appeal processes has regrettably led to the departure of one member, the Belgian Red Cross.

Transparency towards public and private funds is of the outmost importance for our organisation, both internally and externally. On the one hand, our organisation has internal mechanisms ensuring that we learn from previous experiences (knowledge management), that internal evaluations and audits are being carried out and that our staff is aware of our emergency work (internal communication). By doing this, we have managed to focus more on our constituency - people living with disabilities -, and other actors consider HI as the main reference on emergency aid to disabled people. On the other hand, external transparency mechanisms concentrate mainly on financial aspects, making sure that money is well spent, that external audits are being carried out and that reports are available to donors and the public at large. As part of an international network, we work with other HI members. When this collaboration extends to operational matters, clear agreements covering financial and management requirements are signed. Financial and organisational transparency is part of our commitment to donors, beneficiaries, staff and the other HI members.

Trust must remain at the forefront of our relationship with both private and public donors. And this trust is fostered by strengthening internal and external accountability and transparency mechanisms, in financial and human terms.


**Angelo Simonazzi**  
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## NGO FUNDRAISING CONSORTIA: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR TRANSPARENCY

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 **In case of major disasters, NGOs - which are members of national fundraising consortia - can launch a common appeal to the public through media partners. They subsequently share the funds raised to implement their field operations. This collective way of raising funds is possible in some EU Member States, such as Belgium, Germany and the UK. Experience shows that such consortia can be a collective opportunity for its members to move further towards transparency and accountability.**

When a major humanitarian crisis - such as the Tsunami - occurs, each NGO is free to raise private funds on its own. The competitive environment created by an open fundraising 'market' however might pressure the NGO to spend a lot of resources on administration and advertising in order to draw the attention of the public.

A number of major humanitarian NGOs at EU Member State level have developed another fundraising system. As members of a consortium, they can collect a large number of donations from the public at a lower cost than by acting individually. They can have higher media coverage; and they can avoid public confusion which might devolve from competing fundraising messages.

One can assume that, in the context of large humanitarian crisis covered by the media, the public reacts positively to the 'image' of the humanitarian community seen as a homogeneous group. The existence of fund raising consortia is strengthening this public perception, as it brings about the idea of sound management and shared responsibility. As a result, NGOs in consortia have a vested interest in proving to be transparent. Should one consortium member not act in ethical way, this is likely to harm its own credibility but also the credibility of the consortium as a whole.

 **IMPACT ON TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

Do fundraising consortia support quality standards and good practices? For some NGO representatives, consortia do contribute in this field. For others, quality standards are being respected irrespectively of consortia, depending on the level of commitment of each organisation.

Consortia are not transparency and accountability initiatives, since their *raison d'être* is first and foremost fundraising. This being said, their collective approach has a positive impact on quality issues.

Firstly, consortium membership is subject to the fulfilment of selective criteria, which limit the number of potential members. Some of these criteria are professionalism, the adherence to humanitarian quality standards, financial capacity and the geographical scope of field operations. In addition, the British and German consortia (see box) are requiring that the NGOs have monitoring and evaluation systems in place.

Secondly, communication is an important element contributing to the transparency of fund raising appeals. Being exposed together in the media - through large communication campaigns - is 'pushing' NGOs to be accountable. To meet the demand of the private donors to be duly informed, reports are being published on websites and press conferences organised. This is inciting NGOs to explain how they spent their funds.

A third important element is the rules governing the distribution of funds between members. The donations are shared according to a key of repartition based on the NGO's expenditure over the past years. Such objective criteria contribute to the transparency of these fund raising mechanisms. During the appeal, the sharing of funds can be adapted according to the

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*'Evaluations are felt useful both for the fundraising consortia and the individual agency.'*

	DISASTERS EMERGENCY COMMITTEE (DEC)	AKTION DEUTSCHLAND HILFT (ADH)	CONSORTIUM 12/12
<b>EU Member State</b>	United Kingdom	Germany	Belgium
<b>Date of creation</b>	1963	2001	1979
<b>Number of member NGOs</b>	13	10	4

circumstances. For instance, DEC and ADH are taking into account the operational capacity of their members in the affected country. Should one ADH member receive more funds than it can actually absorb, it may divert it to another member. DEC members may redistribute funds to non-members through twinning programmes. The Belgian '12/12' consortium does not take the field capacity of its members into consideration, but NGO members have the possibility to fund non members' projects according to a specific procedure.

One final important criterion in the management of joint national fund raising appeals relates to evaluations conducted after the appeals.

DEC and ADH are carrying out independent evaluations not only of their appeals, but also of the implementation of funds in the field. Since its creation, ADH is constantly improving its evaluation process. The 12-12 Consortium appeals are not subject to independent evaluations, but its tsunami campaign has been auto-evaluated by one of the member organisations.

Evaluations are felt useful both for the fundraising consortia and the individual agency. They favour joint learning between NGO members and can be an encouragement for NGOs to further improve their programming. According to a representative of a DEC member, *'it is always interesting to be able to benchmark ourselves against our peers. DEC monitoring and evaluation are useful to feed into our own programme planning and review'*.



**RAISON D'ÊTRE OF CONSORTIA**

Consortia prove to be successful fundraising systems. Should the collaboration through consortia appear to be the main way for NGOs to stay competitive within the fundraising market, NGOs would have to ensure not being left out and thus meet the conditions to be part of such consortia.


The level of public attention is a determining factor for a successful appeal. Consequently, raising funds through consortia implies active media driven action. Paradoxically, addressing forgotten humanitarian crises through these financial coordination models might prove to be difficult. Yet, extra funds raised in the framework of particularly successful appeals could be redistributed to the benefit of these 'silent' emergencies. If transparency and accountability are indeed important in providing adequate humanitarian relief, these quality issues should yet be first of all directed toward the aid beneficiaries rather than the donors.

**Anne-Sophie Bonnet and VOICE Secretariat**



## SYNERGY SERVING QUALITY OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION

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 **Humanitarian action is an expression of the duty to respond to the vital needs of endangered populations in disasters. Whilst fully respecting the dignity and the cultural identity of the affected individuals and populations, NGOs must meet the needs of those living in often extremely poor conditions and under threat of conflict or natural disaster. Keeping this imperative of solidarity in mind is essential before addressing the issue of professionalism of humanitarian action.**

Quality is obviously necessary to respond adequately to the true needs of those to whom we provide relief and to optimise the means available to achieve this objective. This is why it is at the heart of the humanitarian action. However, although quality can be considered as an ethical obligation, it is not easy to achieve and it requires considerable effort to be put into practice. So in 1999, 26 French NGOs - together with the 'Urgence Reconstruction Développement' (URD) Group <sup>(1)</sup> - decided to found a "Quality Platform". Initially, our primary objective was to express serious concerns on a quality approach mainly based on two elements: technical yardsticks, which were considered to be universal, and international texts (which NGOs felt these would confuse the roles and responsibilities of the various parties involved in humanitarian action).

In 2003, five NGOs <sup>(2)</sup> formed a steering group within Coordination Sud, a platform that brings together 100 French NGOs active in the field of emergency, relief and development. This group defined a common approach on quality, and launched a work programme which stretched over approximately two years and involved around twenty humanitarian organisations. The final result was the publication of a guide entitled 'Synergy Quality Guide - suggestions for quality humanitarian action' <sup>(3)</sup>.

 **THE FOUNDING PRINCIPLES OF THE SYNERGY QUALITY GUIDE**

The Synergy Quality Guide is based on three convictions. First, the quality of humanitarian aid must be determined in a multi-dimensional manner. This conviction led to the identification of five main quality criteria: humanitarian ethics, governance of relief organisations, human resources management, the project cycle, and the role of affected populations (see box).

Secondly, universal rules should not be decreed at this early stage of the thinking process. Since quality should be considered as context-linked, setting norms, which would be 'mechanically' applied to all contexts and organisations, is inconceivable. At the same time, we also consider certain elements as static, and certain standards and tools may be adapted to each context.

The third conviction cuts across the five criteria. It is inspired by several key ideas originally developed by non NGO organisations: risk prevention by anticipating risks at each stage of the project cycle, continuous improvements in quality through an ongoing and shared learning process, overall quality management and the implementation of a quality system within the NGO.

 **IMPLEMENTING QUALITY**

Quality is an imperative, which concerns all parties taking part in humanitarian action, from those operating on the ground to the funding institutions. However, for quality to be achieved, at least two conditions must exist. First, there must be a will within each organisation, in particular its leaders but also its members, since it is important to share this conviction actively. Secondly, adequate means - essentially financial ones - should make it possible to set up tools, look for the advice of experts, and provide necessary training.

*'Quality is an imperative, which concerns all parties taking part in humanitarian action, from those operating on the ground to the funding institutions.'*



## THE FIVE QUALITY CRITERIA

### 1 Humanitarian principles

Humanitarian action is based on strong values and principles which are generally stated in NGO charters, as well as in codes of ethics or conduct. Ethics enables the end to be distinguished from the means, and serve as a guide to achieve objectives and thus serve populations in need. These principles are humanity, impartiality and independence.

Humanitarian ethics takes into consideration the effect the action will have and the future of those assisted. It covers the founding principles of projects, their translation into concrete action, as well as recommendations, precautions and risks.

### 2 Governance of relief organisations

The objective of governance is to ensure the mission of the NGO on the long term. An appropriate model for this approach is one of a valuable partnership between the members of a non-profit organisation. We believe that there is no single model of governance, but rather certain principles which implementation must be regularly reassessed and readjusted.

### 3 Human resources management

Quality of human resources is crucial for the quality of humanitarian programmes. Thus it is essential to optimise of NGOs' practices in this field, through making recommendations and giving advice on recruitment, management of legal issues linked to employment, remuneration, assessment interviews and training. For key activities which affect the quality of programmes, the Guide proposes fact sheets enabling a human resources policy to be built up.

### 4 The project cycle

The COMPASS quality tool, created by the URD Group, has been adopted as it best represents our approach to quality. This method focuses upon management of humanitarian action and its assessment. The COMPASS quality tool takes the shape of a wind rose containing 12 criteria. The key question is to determine whether the action undertaken has a positive impact on the affected populations. The COMPASS quality criteria assist in the evaluation of the project cycle, from its initial conception to the assessment of final results.

### 5 The role of the affected populations

Endangered populations are at the very heart of all humanitarian action. NGOs must go beyond assessing the conformity of a programme to its objectives or technical criteria, and seek to achieve the satisfaction of those assisted by their participation in the aid process.

The Synergy Quality Guide aims at supplementing other existing quality tools. It is still at an experimental stage and thus can be improved. Other topics are still to be explored and certain aspects are open for further study. As a last comment: more globally, one should consider quality for what it is. Quality will not fill the gaps created by the lack of financial means available to meet the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (the reduction of the world poverty by half, before 2015) in humanitarian situations, whether they entail emergency relief, reconstruction or development projects.

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In 2005, the NGO 'SOLIDARITES' celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. It has 11 humanitarian missions with 140 volunteers working in the field, 25 employees at the Head Office and a budget of around € 23 millions (15 % from private donors and 85 % from institutional bodies).

Frankly, I believe that the institutional donors, which advocate the most for quality, are currently providing little funding - if any - for quality, blocking

the administrative costs at 7 % of project budgets. At the same time, the administrative workload generated by these partnerships is rapidly increasing. In 2003, our organisation has been audited three times, in 2005, seven times and we estimate that there will be 14 audits in 2006. Our budget however has proportionately not increased. Paradoxically, the increase of external audits is causing a decrease in internal audits and is reducing our capacity to develop the quality of our humanitarian programmes. I am in favour of audits but I also see the increasing amount of time required to adopt and manage each programme.

At SOLIDARITES, we are using our private funds to support quality in its own right, whether for evaluations, training, tools, or quality support to our programmes. We also call upon voluntary expertise offered by private firms or research institutes. But this is not sufficient to support our efforts towards quality. It is time to consider ways in which funds dedicated to humanitarian action could be optimised through improvements in quality. Starting from a core partnership framework, it may be wise to envisage higher-performance contractual arrangements, which cater for various categories of humanitarian organisations and are based on a quality-orientated process.


A.B.

Notes :

- (1) URD. Urgence Reconstruction Développement (Emergency, Reconstruction, Development). [www.urd.org](http://www.urd.org)
- (2) These organisations are: Action Contre la Faim (Action against Hunger), the French Red Cross, Handicap International, Médecins du Monde, Solidarités.
- (3) Synergy Quality Guide (French title: 'Guide Synergie Qualité'). Available for consultation and download (in French) on the Coordination Sud website: [www.coordinationsud.org](http://www.coordinationsud.org)

## WHY IS IT SO HARD TO TALK TO BENEFICIARIES? SEVEN LARGE NGOs TRY TO INVOLVE PEOPLE AFFECTED BY DISASTERS IN DECISION-MAKING

THE ISSUE - TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF HUMANITARIAN NGOs

 **The Emergency Capacity Building (ECB) Project is focusing on developing staff capacity, accountability and impact measurement, risk reduction, and information and communication technology. The objective of this project is to improve the speed, quality and effectiveness of the humanitarian community in saving lives, improving the welfare, and protecting the rights of people in emergency situations. The following article is focusing on one component of the project: Accountability and Impact Measurement (ECB 2).**

Flip through the CARE, Oxfam, and World Vision evaluations of the tsunami response in South Asia and you'll find ample evidence of the importance of involving local people in decision-making. Take the issue of shelter. With an estimated 1.7 million made homeless by the tsunami, providing temporary shelters was an immediate challenge for humanitarian NGOs. In their rush to erect record numbers of these structures to provide quick relief, harried staff felt they just didn't have sufficient time to talk with those who would be actually living in the shelters about what their future homes should look like.

Yet, results of these evaluations suggest that time spent in such discussions has paid off. In Sri Lanka, beneficiaries were invited to make suggestions for shelter design. Women were asked for advice on the placement of the kitchen. Local materials like timber and thatch were used, earning these shelters the distinction of being called "one of the best [temporary shelter] evaluators have seen in the country." Beyond the purely material benefits, consultations like these make beneficiaries feel like part of the process and aids in building communities, rather than just shelters.

Unfortunately, in other areas of Sri Lanka, beneficiaries or field staff were barely involved in the design and construction of shelters. Without the benefit of local advice, shelters were built according to blueprints and, unsurprisingly, residents complained that they were small and hot. Only in one area where local authorities exerted control over shelter design were they of good quality.

These examples may gloss over many of the conflicting priorities that overworked staff face on a daily basis during an emergency response. Yet evidence indicates that being accountable to beneficiaries, which includes soliciting their input, should be a non-negotiable ingredient of effective programming. Putting this into practice is far from easy, though. Relevant standards and principles do exist - the SPHERE standards, the NGO Code of Conduct, the accountability principles of the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International (HAP-I), to name just a few. They all highlight the importance of beneficiary accountability, but practice is far from universal. Local people still go unconsulted, unaware of their rights as outlined in these standards, and very conscious that the projects designed for them did not deliver what they would have hoped for.

### COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS ON EMERGENCY CAPACITY

The humanitarian sector as a whole is taking significant measures to step up its practice of accountability. The two joint evaluations, one by CARE, World Vision and OXFAM in India and Sri Lanka and a second by CARE and World Vision in Thailand and Indonesia, were undertaken as the Inter-Agency Working Group (IWG) project on emergency capacity building got underway with funding from the Gates Foundation in March 2005. A consortium of seven large humanitarian organizations, the IWG has tasked itself with addressing the speed, quality and effectiveness of emergency response. The project has four components, one of which is to "enhance agency accountability to humanitarian sector standards and improve practices in impact measurement of humanitarian action."

While in the past, there has been a tendency for NGOs to evaluate a single project to fulfill a donor requirement, this IWG project encouraged three of the agencies to conduct joint program-wide evaluations in an attempt to more effectively assess the results of their assistance efforts and capture lessons-learned.

During the two-year span of the project, the Emergency Capacity Building Project's accountability and impact measurement initiative (ECB 2) will identify practical ways for field

<sup>1</sup> Multi-Agency Evaluation of the Tsunami Response: India and Sri Lanka, commissioned by CARE International, Oxfam GB, and World Vision International.

<sup>2</sup> CARE International, Mercy Corps, World Vision International, Save the Children (US), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), International Rescue Committee (IRC), and OXFAM GB.

## THE ECB PROJECT:

- INITIATIVE 1** STAFF CAPACITY: Improved agency effectiveness in sourcing, developing, and retaining quality staff for humanitarian action.
- INITIATIVE 2** ACCOUNTABILITY AND IMPACT MEASUREMENT: Enhanced agency accountability to humanitarian sector standards and improved practices in impact measurement of humanitarian action.
- INITIATIVE 3** RISK REDUCTION: Improved capacity for risk reduction and emergency preparedness among IWG members.
- INITIATIVE 4** INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT): Improved information communication technology in support of humanitarian action and learning, and increased training of field staff in its use.

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*‘For seven agencies working together and with other networks to combine their resources and knowledge, the outlook improves significantly.’*

managers to improve their accountability to local people and better measure the impact of assistance provided. Such “how to do” practices will be written up in a guide that is targeted to field practitioners (typically a Programme or Project Manager) and subjected to subsequent testing and revision through reviewing the lessons learnt from joint evaluations, after action reviews and other impact measuring exercises carried out by IWG agencies and other collaborating actors.

Building upon this momentum, ECB 2 has supported a joint evaluation presently being carried out by CARE, Catholic Relief Services and World Vision, Save the Children- US in Niger to assess agency responses to the food crisis. Joint evaluations in Pakistan and Guatemala are under discussion for early 2006 and lessons learned from these various joint activities can be used to ensure improvements in the joint evaluation process. Led by the country offices and supported by headquarters units, these joint processes are invaluable for strengthening the collaborative relationships, both on the ground and at headquarters level, that are so critical for effective emergency response.



### STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABILITY

The IWG agencies know that they need to strengthen monitoring & evaluation and accountability systems, policies and personnel at field level to ensure program quality and effectiveness. One way they plan to advance this process is by training and deploying a standing team, comprised of approximately two members from each agency. Through these teams, ECB 2 will get a chance to help create accountability advisors in each agency who will provide guidance to colleagues in the field. The teams will undertake much of their training on the ground while performing real-

time evaluations and are expected to field-test the practical tools for involving local people and for measuring impact that are being identified by ECB 2 and other key accountability networks and partnerships such as ALNAP, HAP-I and SPHERE.

For one agency undertaking such a multi-faceted approach to improving accountability within two years, the chances of success would be slim to none. For seven agencies working together and with other networks to combine their resources and knowledge, the outlook improves significantly. Collaborative efforts also increase accountability by virtue of the increased efficiency they bring about in emergency responses. The evaluation of the tsunami response in Sri Lanka and India points out that “competition among the INGOs to ‘secure projects’ for themselves came in the way of taking a joint stand and collaborative position on government design and specifications of temporary shelter.” In addition, the Niger joint evaluation recommends that NGOs increase their coordination and collaboration so that the effectiveness of emergency and recovery programmes is greater.

Whether ECB 2 is successful will depend to a large extent on whether the IWG agencies are able to learn the lessons revealed by exercises such as the tsunami and the Niger joint evaluations. Through ECB 2, the IWG does intend to help ensure that beneficiaries know that their words carry weight, and that they are not objects of charity but right-holders whose satisfaction is the most important criterion for measuring the success of emergency programming. In the best of all worlds, future evaluations of emergency responses will reveal that they have this knowledge and NGOs have used their input to improve their programming-and that will be the ultimate measure of success.


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## STRIVING FOR QUALITY: NGOs TAKE INITIATIVES

THE ISSUE - TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF HUMANITARIAN NGOS

 **During the past decade, the aid community has initiated a number of inter-agency initiatives to improve its accountability, quality and performance in action. Let us have a look at some of the most widely known 'quality initiatives', to which European NGOs widely adhere.**

Currently, 355 NGOs are signatories to the 'Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief', which seeks to safeguard the highest standards of behaviour and maintain independence and effectiveness in disaster relief. The ICRC Code does not concern operational detail, but rather seeks to encourage high standards of independence, effectiveness and impact. It is a voluntary code, enforced by the will of each organization signing it. Written in 1994, the Code of Conduct is still highly relevant and integrates development principles into its vision of humanitarian aid.

Launched in 1997 and based on a collective effort of organisations from more than 80 countries, signed by more than 400 organisations, the Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response sets out what people affected by disasters have a right to expect. The aim of Sphere is to improve the quality of assistance provided to people affected by disasters, and to enhance the accountability of the humanitarian system in disaster response. Minimum operational standards are developed for four sectors (Water/Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion; Food Security; Nutrition and Food Aid; Settlement and non-Food Items and Health Services), while taking into account horizontal issues such as protection, gender, children, older people, disabled people, HIV/AIDS and the environment.

Established in 1997, the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) is a sector-wide network, involving governments,

international organisations and NGOs, which aims to promote a culture of learning across the sector in order to improve performance. It has 50 Full Members and nearly 400 Observer Members. ALNAP is involved in a range of activities including the monitoring of the quality of evaluations and works with agencies to improve their evaluation skills and incorporate lessons learned in their daily work.

Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International (HAP-I) was founded in 2003 by a group of humanitarian agencies committed to making humanitarian work more accountable to its intended beneficiaries, following on from several years of research and field experience. HAP-I is now building a system of voluntary self-regulation, and is currently developing self-evaluation and peer review techniques for accreditation and certification of compliance with the HAP-I Accountability Principles.

Formally established in 1995, People in Aid supports agencies in improving the quality of their human resources management. People in Aid carries out workshops, publishes guidelines and research and facilitates exchange of information between its 70 members around the world.


There are many paths to achieving this goal and while each initiative takes a different route, they have a shared destination. European NGOs, actively involved in all these initiatives, work with a strong commitment to quality and accountability, in a continuous effort to improve their performance.

**Giovanna Solari**  
Consultant

*'European NGOs, actively involved in all these initiatives, work with a strong commitment to quality and accountability, in a continuous effort to improve their performance.'*

## EUROPEAN NGOs ASSESS THEIR TSUNAMI AID INTERVENTION

THE ISSUE - TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF HUMANITARIAN NGOs

 **European NGOs - which have played a crucial role in the response to the Tsunami crisis - are drawing lessons from their intervention. They are also raising a number of recommendations to the European Union for a sustained recovery in Tsunami affected areas.**

During a joint conference held in November in Brussels, VOICE and CONCORD (the European confederation of relief and development NGOs) presented a common Information paper on NGO aid intervention and future challenges. The paper is based on the input of a wide number of European NGOs, most of which were already present in the region prior to the disaster.

The overall humanitarian response to the tsunami disaster has been timely and adequate. NGOs were able to reach almost two million people with emergency medical assistance and food aid. Six months after the tsunami struck, immediate needs have been met and, already after the first month of response, European NGOs were able to channel their efforts into beginning reconstruction and rehabilitation.

*'Overall the aid community has managed as well as possible, considering the magnitude of the disaster', says Paul Grossrieder, President of VOICE. 'As humanitarian professionals, we learned a lot and should apply those lessons to support our continuous efforts in providing effective assistance'.*

Looking back at their own work, the NGOs are recommending more effective coordination among themselves and with other actors, to continue to support the involvement of local communities, to strengthen disaster preparedness and to continue reinforcing their own resources management.

European NGOs also address key recommendations to the European Union, which plays an important role in the response

to the Tsunami crisis. The EU should continue supporting progress towards peace in Aceh and Sri Lanka. It should ensure that reconstruction bodies, such as the Trust Fund, include real representative civilian participation. EU pledges for Tsunami assistance - particularly for sustainable reconstruction and recovery programmes - should be honoured. More attention should be given to effective EC policies with regard to Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development and more funds should be invested in disaster preparedness.

The EU should ensure that the allocation of land is completed appropriately and that the allocation of funds to the different geographical areas is being done on basis of needs without discrimination. Finally, NGOs insist on the need to focus on a participatory approach, including the participation of women, youth and children.

The involvement of NGOs in the Tsunami affected region will continue for the years to come. *'If it took only a few hours to have hundreds of thousands of people disappear, it will take between five and ten years to rebuild what has been lost',* says Frans Polman, President of CONCORD.


### VOICE Secretariat

*To obtain the VOICE CONCORD Information paper 'Tsunami one year after. NGO Aid intervention and future challenges', please contact VOICE ([information@ngovoice.org](mailto:information@ngovoice.org)).*

*'NGOs were able to reach almost two million people with emergency medical assistance and food aid.'*

## EUROPEAN HUMANITARIAN VOLUNTARY CORPS: LET IT SLEEP!

A VIEW ON THE EU

 **Dozens of approaches and initiatives at EU political level are trying to introduce volunteers in humanitarian work outside the EU. Maybe the most prominent one is Article III-321 of the draft EU Constitution under which a 'European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps' (EVHAC) shall be set up in order to establish a 'framework for joint contributions from young Europeans to humanitarian aid operations of the Union'. Fortunately, as part of the draft Constitution, the article - and the whole idea with it - fell into soft slumber. But then the tsunami disaster came and woke it up.**

Why? Did the response to this crisis - or any other major emergency - show any sign that would result in the need to bring young, inexperienced volunteers to a complex setting where one of the major challenges is to keep a good balance and working relations between NGOs, UN agencies, ECHO and, last but not least, the people in need? Would such a corps save one additional life in earthquake stricken Pakistan, or would it just be putting more 'colour' to the drama? The humanitarian community is well experienced and self-confident to give a clear answer to these simple questions: no.

Of course we all agree that voluntarism and civil society participation are good. However one should envisage this input on a long-term basis and in situations more appropriate to voluntarism rather than emergency situations which require experienced, trained professionals available for more than just two-three weeks. A corps of European volunteers would do more harm than good in an activity, which is all about saving lives.

And what about the security issues young volunteers would be confronted with in conflict situations and natural disasters, where dangerous and traumatising events are daily business? A lot of organisations do certainly have reasonable and sound schemes to integrate volunteers into their programmes

at home. These schemes should be the levers to foster voluntarism.

An EVHAC would be yet another vehicle propagating disaster myths, in particular the one cliché of an affected population helplessly waiting for any Western group to save them. Reality shows the contrary. Most survivors owe their life to local teams and not to foreign staff. Remember the earthquake in Bam in 2003, where local volunteers, using ten sniffer dogs, saved nearly 160 lives. Neighbours and other volunteers helped pulling hundreds more to safety. In comparison, 34 teams from 27 countries found just 22 people alive. There are many other examples. Thus any future funds from the European Parliament and Commission for the voluntary corps should perhaps be used for building up local voluntarism in disaster prone countries and engaging local communities in emergency response mechanisms. This approach would probably not be so popular with European voters but would certainly help saving more lives.

The EU has tasked ECHO to undertake an independent review concerning this issue. We all have to pay attention that this 'Corps' does not become a textbook example of a self-fulfilling prophecy. In other words, while most NGOs are not welcoming the idea but, at the same time, support voluntarism in principle, politicians are pushing the idea forward. The traditional close relationship of the humanitarian community to voluntarism may be a reason why so few people are raising their voice and say that the idea of a 'European Humanitarian Voluntary Corps' is just not a good idea.

The Tsunami woke up the idea. Let it sleep again.

**Sid Peruvemba**

Vice Secretary General


Malteser International,

member of the VOICE Working Group on the EVHAC

*'Most survivors owe their life to local teams and not to foreign staff.'*

## HUMANITARIAN NGOs CALL ON THE EU: NORMALISATION IN CHECHNYA IS ONLY APPARENT

### FIELD FOCUS

 **The civilian population in Chechnya has been suffering since the first conflict started in 1996. Their living conditions have kept worsening. Today, the region is still in a conflict situation. For the third year, major French NGOs are drawing the attention of EU institutions to the ongoing humanitarian crisis and warn against the illusion of normalisation in Chechnya.**

Operational in the Russian Federal Republic of Chechnya since 1999, Médecins du Monde and Action Against Hunger witness permanent insecurity and economic constraints which are preventing the population to have access to appropriate medical care and meet their basic needs. Since 2003, both organisations present each year a report based on the situation coming from the field. The conclusion of the 2005 report - entitled 'Struggle for Dignity' - on the humanitarian situation in Chechnya and neighbouring republics of Ingushetia and Dagestan is plain: the so called normalization process is superficial, and the humanitarian consequences of the Chechen crisis remain substantial.

This report has been distributed in autumn to the major European stakeholders (European Commission, European Parliament, Council of Europe), and international donors, as well as to the French government and Parliament. It contains data collected from the teams in the field and gives a clear picture of the harsh living conditions the Chechen population has to cope with. It further recommends that ECHO funds for Chechnya should be kept at least on the same level as before. Moreover, the EU should use their development funds (such as the TACIS € 20 millions budget line for Chechnya) with extreme caution, as those may support talks of normalization, which contradict the situation in the field.

According to Russian and Chechen official statements, the situation in Chechnya is moving towards normalisation. Military operations have been officially terminated

since 2003. Public buildings have been erected. Regional hospitals and institutions are partly operating again. The Government is now paying wages, pensions and other social benefits. Schools and universities are gradually reopening. Described as a 'sideshow' by the head of the Council of Europe fact-finding mission in Chechnya, Andrea Groos, the parliamentary elections took place in November 2005.

The international community seems to share the Russian official optimism. Some donors even start to activate their reconstruction and development budget lines. The situation on the ground however speaks clearly against any normalization and reconstruction perspectives. 80,000 Russian military personnel are permanently stationed in the republic for an estimated population of 800,000 people. People are being killed, tortured or abducted in total impunity. The metastases of the conflict are being felt more and more in Ingushetia and Dagestan and, more generally, in the Northern Caucasus. According to Russian official sources, 91 % of the civilian population is living below the poverty line, with less than € 72 per month. Considering that most of the household expenditures are dedicated to food and medical care, these figures demonstrate how precarious the day-to-day life in Chechnya can be.

The present level of humanitarian assistance does not meet the needs of the population. In the field, NGOs have to work under heavy control of local and Russian authorities, which limit access to parts of the territory. These constraints limit the number of humanitarian actors on the ground, leaving large parts of the population groups without assistance.

Despite official statements, Chechnya is still in a conflict situation severely affecting the living conditions of the population.

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To obtain the humanitarian report on Chechnya 'Struggle for Dignity',  
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*'The present level of humanitarian assistance does not meet the needs of the population.'*

## HUMANITARIAN ISSUES AT EU LEVEL

### VOICE AT WORK

- ★ The VOICE network has been very active over the last year. At our fourth General Assembly, the network approved its second **Strategic Plan** (2005 - 2007) focusing on support to members, being an authority vis-à-vis the European institutions and monitoring humanitarian policies and procedures. VOICE also elected its new president, Mr. Paul Grossrieder, former Secretary General of the International Committee of the Red Cross.
- ★ Over the last months, the monitoring of the third **ECHO Framework Partnership Agreement** (FPA) has resulted in a lot of activities together with the FPA Watch Group, which is representing NGOs in the ongoing consultation process with EC DG Humanitarian Aid (ECHO). The new FPA has been in place for almost two years. Revisions are currently ongoing. By adapting parts of the FPA, the aim is to making it more suitable for the implementation of humanitarian projects in the field. Therefore the NGOs have made their own analysis of the impact of the FPA on their work; they have further identified outstanding challenges, thus contributing to the strengthening of the partnership with DG Humanitarian Aid.
- ★ Since the draft European Constitution proposed a **European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps** (EVHAC), VOICE and its members have been working to document the impact this idea could have on the quality of humanitarian aid and on Southern local NGOs. During autumn, a working group has been collaborating closely with the team in charge of the EC study on the EVHAC. (see page 14 for more)
- ★ VOICE and CONCORD, two of the largest European NGO networks, decided to document the added value of European NGOs in the **Tsunami intervention** and to take a constructive, but critical look both at their own work and that of the EU. The project - consisting mainly in a Conference and the production of an Information Paper - has been financed entirely by member NGOs. (see page 13 for more)
- ★ Since September 2005, VOICE is implementing a programme called '**Enhancing the Network. Improving management and network capacities for European Humanitarian NGOs**', with the support of EC DG Humanitarian Aid. Activities such as trainings, round tables and seminars on relevant humanitarian topics are being organized in the framework of the project.
- ★ **Training sessions** on the application of the FPA have proved to be extremely popular among ECHO NGO partners. The training scheme has been developed by NGOs for NGOs. So far, in 2005, 34 organisations from over 10 EU Member States have participated in three trainings held at VOICE. More sessions are planned in the future.
- ★ **VOICE in EU Member States.** A Round table was organized last October in Paris in order to debate current challenges for EU humanitarian aid and NGOs. The meeting gathered representatives of more than 20 French humanitarian NGOs. London will be the next location where the VOICE Board will be meeting with humanitarian NGOs of a specific EU Member State.



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### VOICE out loud

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