

<p style="text-align: center;">Tsunami 4 months on: What changes for the Humanitarian Sector? April 28, 2005 Round Table Notes</p>

● **Coordination:**

- The coordination has to be led by the UN, and the international community has to further invest in UN coordination.
- The different humanitarian actors, that is NGOs, the UN and the Red Cross need to have a better understanding of each other's role and need a common commitment to the same principles. Each actor should find added value and comparative advantage while working in partnership.
- Difficult to achieve effective coordination when so many different actors are involved.
- Good leadership as well as specific funds are indispensable elements in all coordination efforts.
- Since the Rwanda crisis, the overall coordination between NGOs is better, due to the various evaluations as well as quality initiatives that were carried out. However, even though perfect coordination mechanisms will never be reached, the system is still to be improved.
- The existing coordination mechanisms have to be reviewed by the involved parties. Each group blames the other if things do not work.

● **Role of NGOs**

- NGOs have to decide whether they want to be subcontractors or partners to donors.
- NGOs are losing independence, since many NGOs have a tendency to focus on large scale disasters.
- The humanitarian sector has common principles such as the Sphere Charter and Standards and the ICRC code of conduct. This big effort by the Humanitarian aid community in setting standards as well as criteria and self-evaluation and quality is underestimated. The general public does not take these efforts into account. The whole NGOs community gets blamed for every NGO who does not do a good job. NGOs should be much less defensive and argue that they do have added value and a lot of capacity.
- Emergency relief is a quite well-organized sector, it is a supply-driven business with often fierce competition
- There is a need for strong advocacy. The policy agenda is driven by the security agenda, not by a rights-based agenda.
- Partnership with local NGOs is not always easy. Many new actors lack the appropriate communication channels with the local population and authorities. NGOs have a role to play since they have experience involving the population.
- The assumption that NGOs should be the only guardians of the principles of independence and impartiality is good but not sufficient. The humanitarian principles should be disseminated among other actors (military and civil protection) and governments and politicians.

● **Mobilization of funds:**

- Humanitarian assistance can be mobilized in a very short time.

- New interesting mechanisms of fundraising have emerged.
- The Tsunami brought about a significant mobilization, among the public as well as among the civil society.
- 20% of the aid come from the public, in Germany alone, 500 million euros came from private donors.
- There was an over-financing for humanitarian relief efforts since many funds have to be spent at a later stage in the recovery process.
- Need for flexibility in the use of funds in order to be able to finance also reconstruction and development or use money for other crisis e.g. Dafur.

● **Governments role:**

- Many governments admitted in lessons-learned exercises that they took badly informed decisions, being too much influenced by public opinion. That could lead to the conclusion that the Good Donorship Initiative has failed.
- The Geneva conventions represent a good framework for humanitarian action, but main governments do not respect the framework anymore.
- Governments have to be more transparent about their donation and pledges.
- A reflection should be carried out to change inappropriate donor behaviour of governments through advocacy and lobbying.

● **New actors:**

- We cannot any longer think in the terms of NGOs and the UN being the only humanitarian actors. Since there are a lot of other civil society actors, we ought to take a broader view.
- General tendency that humanitarian aid is losing ground to non-humanitarian actors. (e.g. military).
- The debate around different actors has to be pushed at national level first, since governments do not seem to have a strong opinion about NGOs as crucial actors in humanitarian response.
- The UN has to understand they are not the only actor, they need to work closely with NGOs partners. Partnership with NGOs is a better way for the UN to deliver assistance. UNHCR should essentially take care of protection, complemented by a strong partnership with NGOs concerning the assistance aspect.
- New actors are not only a problem for the NGOs, the whole humanitarian community has been divided in its response to the crisis. While NGOs, the UN and the Red Cross have been discussing among themselves they all lost sight of the fact that other actors were entering the scene.
- We have also to ask the question whether the traditional humanitarian sector is able to cope alone with disasters of such scale as the Tsunami. The ongoing mapping of the traditional humanitarian actors will bring about a better understanding of the sector's capacity and the eventual need for other actors.
- Relationships between NGOs, civil protection and the military need improvement. This is a complex matter since the approaches to humanitarian interventions are based on very different mandates and principles.