



Stockholm RT – 7 March 2017:

Church of Sweden



**WHS, the Grand Bargain, Aleppo and Ukraine: what should the EU's humanitarian priorities be in 2017?**

*Stockholm, 7 March 2017*

**Summary:**

On 7 March, 50 humanitarian actors from Europe and Nordic countries met in Stockholm to exchange on key priorities in policy and operational follow-up to the World Humanitarian Summit, the Grand Bargain on Humanitarian financing.

Speakers identified the following from the discussion:

- the importance of ensuring national level engagement, from NGOs and governments alike in European policy making, through the European Parliament and Member States in Council.
- the continued relevance of multi-stakeholder dialogue at national and European level in follow-up to the WHS process
- in order to 'leave no one behind', ensure that funding instruments can follow and respond to the operational needs in bridging between humanitarian and development
- reducing the gap between resilience rhetoric and resilience practice – particularly as regards risk inclusive development programming
- extensive good practice and awareness of the challenges in terms of localisation and simplification of humanitarian assistance
- a call for a wider approach to multi-year funding, to cover recurrent/seasonal crises and complex crises as well as protracted crises.
- A desire for inclusive multi-year planning, while being aware that the level, type and context of planning will determine NGOs perceived ability to participate.

With speakers from the Swedish Foreign Ministry, the European Commission's Humanitarian aid office (DG ECHO), the VOICE Board and Swedish VOICE members IAS, PMU and Church of Sweden, and participation from a further five Danish, Norwegian and Finnish members the day's discussions helped highlight the continued commitment of participants to effectiveness and efficiency in humanitarian assistance in order to ensure quality, needs-based and principled support to crisis-affected people. The roundtable recalled the need for dialogue across sectors on addressing the concrete challenges of linking relief rehabilitation and development and underlined the will of participants to keep the multi-stakeholder nature of the World Humanitarian Summit alive.

## Detail

### **Panel 1: EU Humanitarian Aid in 2017: Policy Framework**

- Niklas Wiberg, Head of section for Humanitarian Affairs, Swedish MFA
- Chiara Gariazzo, Director, ECHO, European Commission
- Kathrin Schick, Director, VOICE

*Chair: Floris Faber, ACT Alliance EU office*

**Mr. Wiberg** gave an overview of Sweden's humanitarian priorities, and underlined Sweden's ongoing commitment to dialogue with NGOs as main humanitarian partners. The **priorities** he highlighted were: 1) a needs based, fast flexible and predictable humanitarian system; with a focus on implementation of the Grand Bargain, 2) listening to people affected by crisis, 3) innovative ways to support local actors, 4) gender and 5) bridging between humanitarian and development. He noted in particular appreciation for the role ECHO has taken in driving the Grand Bargain process forward, underlined Sweden's focus on the quality as well as the quantity of humanitarian assistance, reflected on the need to integrate conflict prevention better and the ongoing dialogue with SIDA about this, as well as Sweden's prioritisation of the need to address forgotten crises, such as Yemen. He concluded that donors must continue to push for humanitarian assistance in line with humanitarian needs, principles and IHL.

**Ms. Gariazzo** spoke in particular about the future priorities of ECHO in relation to the policy framework and the Grand Bargain. Speaking about the global humanitarian situation she underlined that the common challenge of all humanitarian actors was the efficiency and effectiveness of aid in the context of rising needs and stable budgets, and that it was in this context, and the framework of both Agenda 2030 'leave no one behind' commitments and the EU's own Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy that **resilience and the nexus between humanitarian and development** was so important. She emphasised that the opportunities to work with development partners were context specific and were limited by the need to respect humanitarian principles. She shared the concerns of Scandinavian partners about the difficulties in expanding the scope of humanitarian assistance in the context of access and security threats.

She underlined the following policy **priorities** 1) implementation of the WHS commitments especially on pressing issues including IHL and the Grand Bargain, 2) the upcoming 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the European Consensus on humanitarian aid as an opportunity to highlight its effectiveness as a framework of the EU and member states, 3) the humanitarian evaluation underway, and the opportunity for stakeholders to be consulted from May, with results due in December, 4) the importance of effective humanitarian assistance to respond to the current EU budgetary and regulatory constraints.

Speaking about funding and financing issues, she acknowledged that for partners, mid-year funding 'top-ups' were unpredictable and underlined that ECHO is looking at methods for better planning and piloting multi-annual approaches. She hoped that the ongoing revision of the financial regulation would provide the opportunity for simplified assessments, and reporting. For the **Grand Bargain on humanitarian financing**, she underlined donors' efforts to discuss harmonised reporting, and ECHO's expectations from partners: transparency on cost structures, reduced management costs and results based reporting. In closing she emphasised the EU's commitment to the values of solidarity and partnership. She underlined that the quality of **partnerships with NGOs** was a priority.

**Ms. Schick** underlined that this event would not be possible without the financial support of ECHO. Commenting on the political climate shaping policy and practice she noted that a potential barrier to increased effectiveness and efficiency in humanitarian assistance were the increasing requirements in the context of counter-terrorism. In addition, while Sweden and ECHO remain committed to needs-based assistance and humanitarian principles, the reality in a situation like Greece has shown how difficult this can be. Speaking about the EU's planned new resilience communication she expressed concern that the initiative focusses more on the EU's interests than values, and about widening and politicising the scope away from a focus community resilience. As an example she mentioned that this creates challenges for ECHO if it is contributing to common funds, like Trust Funds, for resilience. Looking forward Ms Schick underlined that the continued efforts to implement the WHS and Consensus commitments were appreciated and hoped the outcome of the humanitarian evaluation would result in no need to change the Consensus.

She highlighted the need for humanitarian donors like Sweden and ECHO to pursue UN reform. On the Grand Bargain, she underlined that the pursuit of effectiveness and efficiency had to be based on partnership. While predictable and flexible funding was under the spotlight, quality and timeliness was also essential. She questioned if ECHO's consultations with partners were being done in a timely manner, and if the push for consortia, big contracts and cash were really responding to the diversity of needs in the field? ECHO's strength has traditionally been precisely this operational understanding.

In conclusion she urged Swedish and Nordic partners (NGOs, SIDA and MFA alike) to maintain contact with the relevant decision makers at EU level on resilience, the financial regulation and the 2018 EU humanitarian aid budget.

### **Discussion**

The debate with participants focussed on a few issues related to the Grand Bargain and to donors' relations with NGO partners, such as, reporting conditions, and expectations regarding cost structures and management costs, support to local actors as well as options to work further on funding aspects of the humanitarian-development nexus. In conclusion, the panel reminded participants to link with their parliamentarians in Brussels (MEPs), and governments about EU files, especially the revised EC financial regulation which has a potential impact on the partnership between NGOs and the EU.

### **Panel 2: Bridging between humanitarian and development aid**

- Anna Garvander, Head of Humanitarian Team/International Department, Church of Sweden
- Jessica Hedman, Humanitarian Aid Coordinator, PMU
- Marek Stys, Head of Emergency & External Relation, People In Need

*Chair: Ester Asin Martinez, Save the Children International EU liaison office*

Setting the scene for the discussion, the Chair underlined how important implementation was for policy – at EU level much policy progress had been achieved on bridging humanitarian and development: a new policy on forced displacement, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) commitments, attention on resilience and new funding modalities such as the EU Trust funds. She underlined that the new resilience policy will have an impact on development and humanitarian funding.

**Ms. Garvander** commented on the positive dialogue with Sweden in the run-up to the WHS and Sweden's strong commitments, but noted that since, dialogue on implementation was needed. Referring for example to the **needs in northern Uganda**, with 2-3000 refugees arriving per day, Sweden's commitment to durable solutions for refugees were very important. Uganda had welcomed over 1 million refugees from South Sudan and under the refugee response plan was giving them plots of land to cultivate. The system was stretched and inflexible though, with insufficient resources, food and water. The plots of land required tractors – a typical development response - but as humanitarians in a refugee situation, food and water was what Church of Sweden had first been prepared to work on. NGOs and donors alike have allowed themselves to become inflexible through the humanitarian/development divide.

She remarked that SIDA's new **Syria Strategy** is quite innovative, with a regional approach factoring in resilience, democracy, human rights, environmental sustainability and the needs of women and children. Like with the WHS, NGOs had been able to have positive dialogue with Sweden ahead of the Strategy, but now are not clear on its implementation.

She had a number of **priorities for making progress on bridging between humanitarian and development:**

**Disaster Risk Reduction:** Increase the funding for risk reduction and institutionalise the regional and global risk reduction and investments in resilience for slow onset crises (e.g. Southern Africa). DRR, Climate Change Adaptation, and the Sustainable Development Goals should be mainstreamed into local, national and regional plans. Proper grassroots consultation is needed for this and all risk analysis should factor in conflict. Look at the coherence between Sendai and parts of Agenda2030.

**Re-examine financing mechanisms:** the system does not currently facilitate resilience programming from day one. While mixing funding streams may not work, at the moment they are too rigid.

**Strengthen local protection initiatives:** such as the 'local to global' initiative. She encouraged Sweden to maintain the strategic approach which allowed SIDA to use humanitarian funding for capacity building, helping ensure good quality local responses.

**Ms. Hedman** highlighted the need for more '**transitional funding and programming**' focusing on the situation in **Syria and its impact in Lebanon**, where PMU has been supporting humanitarian responses through its own and institutional funding. PMU mainly pilots programmes for replication with larger donors later and target gaps in others' programming. She. After recalling some of the main statistics related to the impact of the conflict she looked at a few ways PMU has tried to look at longer-term needs.

In terms of **longer term funding**, she used the example of the impact of the conflict on children, she explained the complexity and medium/long-term timeframes involved in responding to the educational needs of children in the Bekaa valley – ranging from the resources their families have, to negotiating for better educational facilities than tents. Yet, most partners are working with 12, 6 or 3-month funding streams which has an impact on education options. It is very difficult to monitor education for children in those timeframes, or deliver on the needs, if funding is not available in a timely way. Some institutional funds exist for shifting to longer-term programme, such as the EU Madad trust fund. But they take up to 18 months to negotiate, and a smaller NGO cannot cover the funding for that time.

Looking at the importance of an enabling policy environment she explained that PMU are also trying to provide **vocational training** with a view to Syrian reconstruction when the time comes, but in the Lebanon 2020 response plan there must be tangible benefits for both displaced and host communities. Host communities have seen GDP growth drop 7%, unemployment grow and their society's resilience is reaching capacity, so this is important, but it does also create some restrictions on the vocational training programmes. She recommended that donors look more at transitional programming and funding, and in this regard commended WFP for its approach to protracted crises.

**Mr. Stys** underlined the need for **context specificity** when looking at responding to the needs of **conflict affected** and forcibly displaced people using Ukraine and the Syria/Iraq as examples. He pointed out that about 80% of humanitarian assistance is in conflict settings and settings of forced displacement. The real solution was political, but as humanitarians, this was not something that could be meaningfully tackled, but more resilience support could.

Speaking about PIN's operations **Ukraine**, he underlined the gaps created by the situation for different IDPs and refugees depending on donor support and the political situation. On top of the millions in need of humanitarian assistance in the 'grey zone' and the non-government controlled areas, there are 1 million people scattered all over the country with a great potential to boost the Ukrainian economy if there were resilience funds and measures to support them. The government has other priorities, the EU could, but it has only provisional measures for Ukraine, while the humanitarian assistance funds are very focussed, and USAID which is another donor present, also doesn't have a coherent IDP strategy.

Speaking about the situation in **Northern Syria and Iraq** he underlined that there were areas unaffected by war in terms of agriculture, and others, like Kobane which have been liberated for over two years, while basic services and infrastructure have been devastated, and while there is well focussed needs-based humanitarian assistance, like food, NFI kids and vouchers, there is too little attempt at **early recovery**. Despite the potential very few INGOs and donors are willing to work there. Humanitarian assistance is being handed over to development objectives in only scattered ways. The EU's **Madad fund** is designed for this, but faces problems of timeliness and political limitations. It will not fund anything inside Syria, while Lebanon and Turkey block implementation of some funds. Meanwhile project in Iraq approved 9 months previously are still not taking place.

**Morten Högnessen from DanChurchAid**, commented on the new Danish strategy which integrates development and humanitarian aid fully. Like Sweden, Denmark recognises a need to work differently on protracted crises and resilience. DANIDA funding has been flexible for NGOs, but in the new Strategy, it's not clear how the separate funding streams for humanitarian and CSOs will interact. NGOs still hope to help shape this. Reflecting on the dilemmas between sticking to humanitarian principles and doing more development interventions, he remarked that in the Strategy it had been left to NGOs on the ground to navigate this. NGOs appreciate the flexibility, but also see a certain opportunism in funds that stretch from needs-based, to resilience and stability objectives. A speaker from **IAS Denmark** complemented this with information that there will be new designated funds for smaller development NGOs with a local presence for relief interventions.

**Discussion:** The discussion reflected on if the development systems and structures were adequately integrating risk and flexibility, if NGOs needed to do more to adapt to improved policy frameworks, on good examples of transitional funding (such as the use of 'reset' for EC funding in Ethiopia), and how best to respond to people's urgent and longer-term needs simultaneously. Two speakers

recommended focussing on 'needs' rather than 'life-saving' as the guidance for a more longer-term approach to humanitarian assistance.

In conclusion, Ms Asin underlined that local solutions in communities provided the potential for innovation, but that funding mechanisms and systems are not working right to help us work differently or in a timely manner. In order to live up to the commitment of leaving no one behind, for the people we work with, resilience has to be community based, while political solutions must be sought to resolve conflicts.

## Grand Bargain: EU presentation and workshops

The afternoon saw Harmke Kruithof, a representative of DG ECHO, give a presentation on the **Grand Bargain** and the policy priorities and challenges there are for the EU to implement it. This was complemented by a Swedish Foreign ministry representative, and members had the opportunity to ask questions about both the priorities and process in relation to Grand Bargain implementation.

During **two workshops**, participants also provided recommendations on **localisation** and **multi-year planning** for the ongoing work of the VOICE Grand Bargain task force on these themes.

### Conclusions:

**Daniel Zetterlund, CEO of IAS and VOICE Board member**, underlined that having a European perspective at the roundtable had helped boost the Swedish appetite for follow-up dialogue with their foreign ministry and SIDA, especially about the new Swedish Strategy. He also commented on the need for NGOs in Nordic countries to engage more with their governments, observing that 'we are proud of our donors and government and we should share our good practices at European level'.

**Nicolas Borsinger, President of VOICE** underlined how useful these roundtables could be at ensuring that policy and concepts were being put in the context of the field realities NGOs faced. Reflecting on the European and global situation, politically and for humanitarian action, he hoped these discussions could positively shape the future policy and funding environment in the EU, underlining the need for Europe to retain a needs-based and global approach to its humanitarian assistance.

VOICE (*Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies*) is a network representing 85 European NGOs active in humanitarian aid worldwide. VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor with the EU on emergency aid, relief, rehabilitation and disaster risk reduction. It represents and promotes the values and specific features of humanitarian NGOs.



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