

European NGOs' proposals to improve Disaster Preparedness in co-operation with the EC

VOICE - EuronAid

Introduction

At the end of March 1998, two of the main European NGO networks, VOICE (focused on Humanitarian Aid) and EuronAid (focused on Food Aid and Food Security), organised a 2 day seminar in Brussels on Disaster Preparedness with El Niño as case study.

This initiative was supported by both ECHO, who co-financed the seminar, and DG VIII-B1; these were in fact the two bodies within the Commission dealing with El Niño at an operational level. The seminar gathered about 40 participants among which 25 European NGOs were represented (see attached programme and list of participants).

Based on our experiences in the El Niño crisis and on the constructive debate engaged in during the seminar, this paper aims to introduce the proposals of NGOs in order to develop coherent mechanisms for co-operation between NGOs and the European Commission in future crises and thus improve our effectiveness.

The timing of this paper is particularly significant bearing in mind developments within the Commission, with both the setting up of the Combined Services, the restructuring of DG VIII and the end of the first mandate of ECHO in 1999.

The seminar has highlighted various issues of concern which have implications for both NGOs and the Commission and which NGOs would like to take forward in a constructive manner. In particular, it was recognised that :

- a. there is room for improvement on all sides in terms of timely information dissemination and facilitation of access to information;
- b. despite the significant progress made by the EC at the level of internal co-ordination, there is a need for greater involvement of NGO's in the planning and development of policy and procedures; and
- c. access to funds, information and mechanisms which control access to funds, directly affect NGO's capacity to respond.

It is important to note that the principles of Linking Relief, Rehabilitation & Development (LRRD) underpin the basis of this paper.

The position of Disaster Preparedness within the Relief-Rehabilitation-Development continuum is a key subject for debate; there are many different levels of intervention, from the pro-active aimed at prevention and mitigation through to the more reactive, primarily concerned with response and coping mechanisms. Within the NGO community, there is huge diversity here, as the reduction of poverty, distress and suffering involves a broad spectrum of activities. It is however increasingly recognised that the role of Disaster Preparedness is integral to the process of sustainable development and as such

can reduce the need for relief assistance when disaster strikes.

NGO proposals

Preliminary note

The specific strengths and characteristics of NGOs should be recognised, such as :

- their wealth of experience,
- the relationship with their local partners and access to the most vulnerable groups,
- their commitment to local capacity building,
- their integrated and multi-disciplinary approach and
- their capacity for political analysis integrating local knowledge and close understanding of the context

European NGOs are organised within specialised networks belonging to, or working closely with, the Liaison Committee of NGOs who is recognised by the European Commission as the political representative body and relevant counterpart. These existing networks provide both NGOs and the Commission with a wide range of services and information related to their respective areas. The need for further development and improvement of co-operation with the EC, implies the strengthening of existing networks, as specialised sources of information and co-ordinating bodies.

Information (dissemination and access):

- Information about all EC initiatives of interest for NGOs, including those undertaken in the field, has to be given in advance at an appropriate time;
- An improved flow of information between EC local Delegations and Brussels' headquarters must be assured ;
- More coherent dissemination of information would require the setting up of a specific information system which could be managed by NGO networks and should be designed in close collaboration with the EC ;
- Having an NGO seat in task forces and committees could bring a significant added value in order to ensure a more complete exchange of information and a better planning of actions ;
- The existing European NGO networks should be better used both by the EC and NGOs as privileged channels of information dissemination.

Access to funds:

- Mechanisms should be kept simple and flexible thereby enhancing efficiency.
- At a time when the world's weather patterns are completely disrupted:
 - funds for responses to "extreme weather" for use in any country at any time are necessary;
 - funds should be made available for up-front costs in order to further develop DP activities;
 - clear and consistent procedures with the setting of realistic deadlines

- would improve the planning process;
- Funds could be made available for up-front costs in order to further develop Disaster Preparedness activities at the response level;
 - Funding mechanisms should favour those activities which provide continuity between Emergency relief and Development programmes, in order to ensure structural stability and sound prevention of, or preparedness to, recurrence of phenomena. It is recommendable that co-ordination schemes are implemented with other concerned EC units (i.e. DG VIII co-financing) accordingly.

Co-ordination :

- Disaster Preparedness is not only to be seen as a response oriented tool but as an integral part of Development activities. After an intervention under emergency circumstances, or within development projects, DP means should be implemented when and where crisis are susceptible to occur again. In this case, all the actors should be invited to co-ordinate either on the EC initiative or at the NGOs'one and special funds should be available locally to do so. In this sense, co-ordination must be ensured between ECHO and DG VIII and between those organisations operating at one or more levels in the spectrum;
- Respective roles and responsibilities of EC representatives in Brussels and the field have to be clearly defined and communicated to NGO's ;
- Co-ordination on the spot should be ensured through the establishment of Steering committees at local level with the participation of NGOs, local partners and EC representatives ;
- In certain circumstances, European NGO networks could facilitate global requests for joint local programmes (integration of small NGOs, co-ordinated approach by area,...).

26 October 1998