

FOCUS:
Haiti: The NGO
Perspective

From the VOICE Secretariat

2010 will be remembered for the enormous natural disasters that struck Haiti and Pakistan. On January 12, a large earthquake hit Haiti, killing over 200,000 people. In July, persistent rains led to the flooding of one third of Pakistan. Both disasters are characterised by challenges in terms of logistics, coordination, access, security and timely funding. While media attention to Haiti has diminished, it is clear that the needs are still great. Ten months after the quake this newsletter looks back on the Haiti experience to date.

Many humanitarian NGOs, including many VOICE members, were already working in Haiti; a challenging environment even before the disaster took place. Such NGOs, with teams and partners in place and knowledge of the Haiti context, were amongst the first actors to respond. Today, they continue to be in the frontline of response to this crisis. Several contributors to this newsletter share good practices on how to engage disaster-affected people in the response to emergencies. The drive to constantly seek improved quality and accountability also emerges as a key theme.

The articles in this issue draw on different aspects of the humanitarian response, including involvement of and coordination between various actors, disaster risk reduction and protection. In 'A view on the EU', VOICE is pleased to present an interview with Michèle Striffler, the Humanitarian Rapporteur of the Development Committee of the European Parliament, on the response to Haiti and on EU humanitarian aid policy. This edition's 'Field focus' is on Gaza, where despite political efforts the reality for the population is frustratingly unchanged.

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.

VOICE

VOICE stands for Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies. It is a network representing 86 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 preparedness. 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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The trends in the international humanitarian system are anything but promising. The latest major natural disasters are illustrative of the problems confronting humanitarian agencies and the international community. Meanwhile, one central issue is unlikely to change: the discrepancy between the declared objectives of humanitarian aid to satisfy the needs of the most vulnerable on the one hand, and observed practice on the other. Looking back in order to speculate on the future ahead, a rather pessimistic position seems to be realistic.

Even though the humanitarian system is still dominated by the OECD/DAC donors, a recent report has clearly shown that other countries, from the Gulf region and elsewhere, are increasingly emerging as donors. One explanation might be that governments other than the rich industrial countries have discovered their empathy for the many people in need in emergencies. An alternative explanation is that generosity may not only pay off in reputation but also provide political influence. The further politicisation of humanitarian aid is therefore more than likely.

In addition, armed conflicts such as the one in Afghanistan have reinforced the trend of linking humanitarian aid to military and political objectives. This trend is based on the misleading idea that the affected population will "pay back" the aid provided with political support. However, the evidence indicates that this strategy puts at risk the activities and lives of humanitarian workers. The response to natural disasters in Haiti and Pakistan have also shown a reinforced tendency to subordinate humanitarian aid to the political objectives of maintaining/restoring security, reconstruction and development. This leads to confusion concerning the different roles and mandates of the various actors involved in the response as well as the norms guiding their behaviour.

A further challenge is the humanitarian reform process and the issue of coordination. As a recent report by ODI argues, "it is vital to treat the process of humanitarian reform as a political process as much as a technical or moral one"¹. A better formulation would be that the political process of humanitarian reform needs to be fundamentally revised. The core issue is the problem of collective action, so there is a need for coordination at the different levels of responsibility of humanitarian agencies and also a need for capacity to make sure that the humanitarian imperative, which everybody agrees upon in principle, is applied. To achieve this goal, a number of conditions need to be satisfied.

What seems to be overlooked is that coordination is first and foremost a responsibility of states themselves. Unless they reach a consensus, coordination is no more than a technical tool. Intergovernmental coordination is necessary for the funding of principled humanitarian action leading to the collective satisfaction of the people most in need. States should coordinate their policies concerning the link between relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development, along with agreement on clear operational criteria drawing the borderlines between humanitarian action and the politically defined principles for reconstruction and development. The European Consensus gives clear guidance in this respect.

Another condition is related to coordination by the UN. While their role is in principle recognised as necessary and useful, the way this system operates in practice is anything but satisfactory. Both politics and bureaucratic interests inhibit a more efficient and effective coordination process.

Lastly, coordination applies also to the NGOs. The European Consensus supports the diversity of humanitarian partners. Yet diversity and heterogeneity in terms of different interpretations of principled humanitarian action seem to be part of the problem, at least at the strategic level of the individual organisations. At the core is the problem of the struggle of each organisation to access scarce resources. As a result, the humanitarian system risks following the same logic as the international economic and financial system: a process of oligopoly formation. What does this imply for the survival of smaller humanitarian NGOs, and what will the consequences be for the diversity of the sector?

With all the above in mind and in the light of increasing disasters, the upcoming EC Communications provide an opportunity for the Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response to promote clarity of roles, diversity of humanitarian actors, and reassert the fundamental non-political nature of humanitarian aid.

1. Ramalingam, B. and Barnett, M., 'The Humanitarian's Dilemma: collective action or international inaction in international relief?' Background Note, Overseas Development Institute: London, August 2010, p. 8.



WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM HAITI FOR CHILD PROTECTION IN EMERGENCIES?

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It would be difficult to find a relief worker, a private supporter or a government that does not agree on the importance of prioritising the needs of children after a disaster. Children are always identified as a vulnerable group and journalists actively seek out stories that demonstrate the impact of the disaster on children's lives. Yet ironically, understanding and funding for child protection work post-disasters is still weak and can trigger 'knee jerk reactions' that don't take into account the complexities of the field.

The enormous earthquake that hit Haiti on January 12 was yet another blow to a country already suffering from multiple challenges. An estimated 220,000 people died and more than a million people were displaced.

World Vision has been working in Haiti for over 30 years and despite the personal impact on many Haitian staff, a rapid response was initiated. A regular feature of our emergency programming is child protection work. World Vision immediately undertook integrated assessments and as well as its many other health, shelter, WASH and distribution activities, began a child protection programme supporting initially up to 10 Child Friendly Spaces in spontaneous camps in the city. World Vision also immediately provided training for all its relief workers, ensuring that all staff were alert to child protection issues. Moreover, we rapidly began recruitment, training and participation in the establishment of a multi-agency country-wide tracing programme identifying and reuniting children separated from their families by the quake.

The reality was however, that the earthquake exacerbated a problem that already existed in Haiti prior to the disaster. Data on the situation of separated children¹ is imprecise but an estimated half a million children live on the streets or in orphanages. Between 300,000 and 500,000 children are thought to be living and working as unpaid domestic workers. For example, in a survey conducted prior to the quake, of 3,188 children in urban areas, 22% were living away from home. Using 'back of the envelope' figures², it is estimated that a staggering third of all Haitian children (under 14) live away from their families, in situations which contradict one of their basic human rights. Not only did this present a significant protection challenge to agencies, it also brought sharply into focus the challenges that the relief community faces in communicating the work that they do, and the changing context that humanitarian aid responses are now operating in.

Two responses widely seen after the Haiti earthquake are particularly problematic in the context of child protection concerns: international adoptions and support to traditional 'orphanages'. It is important to note that both of these interventions are controversial enough in non-disaster settings. Although widely practiced, international adoption is often conducted by 'for-profit' agencies. Moreover, the challenge of standardising adoption practices across so many national legal frameworks means that systems are often open to abuse and questionable practices. The Haitian government rightly enacted an immediate moratorium on international adoptions. In addition, child focused agencies in Europe wrote a letter to European Parliamentarians to ensure that 'fast-track' adoptions were not called for but instead support to the moratorium upheld. Nevertheless, there were still emotional new reports of Haitian orphans 'rescued' by their adoptive parents that further reinforced the suggestion that children need to be taken away from their country to be well cared for.

Support and implementation of traditional orphanages remain a popular activity by small private groups, and are seen as a direct and effective 'solution' to the needs of separated children, despite ample evidence to the contrary. World Vision and other agencies have a strong policy of seeing institutional care as the option of last resort, including in emergencies. Keeping children in their home communities is the best way of supporting them through a terrifying experience and for their future development into adulthood. Furthermore, the definition of 'orphans' often varies significantly from culture to culture and from legal framework to legal framework. This variance is frequently exploited by groups who support orphanages for fundraising purposes even though they are shown to be costly. In short, institutionalising children is the exact opposite of what they need. Despite ongoing efforts by UNICEF and child focused NGOs to educate the public and media on the best way to protect children, it seems that there is still a need for strong political leadership and public education about what children in emergency situations really need and the specialised analysis and nuanced response that are required.

There also seems to be an ongoing paradox as humanitarian aid faces the new challenges of worldwide emergencies. On the one hand, private and government donors rightly demand ever increasing evidence of professionalism. And

'European governments and the European Commission should take more seriously the need for expertise and funding of child protection work in emergencies'

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indeed, finally we are able to benefit from the growing bodies of literature on lessons well learned over the many years of relief work. Yet, at the same time, under intense media scrutiny and internet experts, there is also a tendency for politicians and public alike to search for 'quick win' solutions, even when the evidence is to the contrary.

So what lessons can be learned from the Haiti experience?

One sign of progress was the rapid release of messages on child protection and the needs of separated children. Yet given the scale of pre-disaster figures of separated children, more could have been done to immediately identify separated children and either place them in safe temporary care or reunify them with their families. To a weary child protection professional it can often seem that child protection takes second place to the pressing concerns of shelter and clean water and food. Undoubtedly, these needs are as important for separated children as for the rest of the affected population. Yet time must be taken during needs assessments, medical responses and distributions to identify separated children and to address their special requirements. For example, search and rescue teams or medical groups may forget, in their need to deliver urgent medical care, the importance of ensuring that the child is registered, and preferably kept with a family member. Too easily children can be separated from their families in the confusion of a clinic or the rush to collect food supplies, putting the child into an unnecessary situation of further vulnerability.

Without a caring adult to advocate for them, separated children, especially those with disabilities, may disappear into the crowd. In Haiti it has been documented how working children or 'restaveks' regularly faced discrimination prior to the quake. In times of family crisis, those divisions are further deepened and children may find themselves excluded and left to fend for themselves. The fact that potentially one third of Haitian children were apart from their families demonstrates that this is not a 'minority' issue.

European governments and the European Commission should take more seriously the need for expertise and funding of child protection work in emergencies. All agencies (including donor agencies) should have a child protection policy to ensure that staff are aware of the special needs and concerns of children. A regular challenge is to find trained international and local

personnel who can quickly establish quality child protection programmes and provide the in-depth data on vulnerable children that decision makers so desperately need.

In the case of Haiti's reconstruction phase there should be reform of the institutional care system with support for government monitoring and oversight of children's institutions. The government and local civil society need support for awareness-raising among the Haitian population that the best place for a child is with their family. Individual assistance is required for the poorest families whose fragile household economy cannot support an extra child.

Perhaps the last lesson from Haiti is to understand the trend of increased media and public scrutiny. In general, increased mass media attention and involvement in Humanitarian Aid and NGO work comes as something of a mixed blessing. Coverage of disaster events is a critical ingredient in an organisation's financial viability to respond to disasters. The massive outpouring of support from donors of all sizes and types following the Haiti earthquake speaks of the positive power of the media in mobilising resources in support for those in need. Media has the potential to be a strong and positive force in keeping host governments, donors and aid actors alike accountable to the real needs of disaster survivors. In particular, media has the *potential* to keep the profile of child protection concerns, challenges and needs in the forefront as the 'story' of a disaster response is told to the public, thereby actively shaping public response so as to be sensitive to those same concerns.

Educating our donors and ourselves about quality aid work will mean tough decisions. Aid agencies and donors alike will have to sacrifice potential funding if it does not meet international standards or comes with unacceptable conditions. It also means that we have to think carefully about the stories we tell, or hear, to look for a fair and accurate picture of aid work. If we do not do these things we risk losing the incredible support of European people who continue to care for those unnamed children in a foreign country. The risk of aid fatigue has been already apparent in the Pakistan flood response, and it will increase if we do not make our case wisely and well.

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'The earthquake exacerbated a problem that already existed in Haiti prior to the disaster (...) a staggering third of all Haitian children live away from their families'

A MUSLIM ORGANISATION IN HAITI: A DIVERSITY OF ACTORS FOR ENLARGING THE SCOPE OF HUMANITARIAN AID

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'Some people were clearly wondering why on earth a Muslim organisation would do anything in a non-Muslim country'

★ The decision by Secours Islamique France (SIF) to intervene in Haiti was taken without any delay or hesitation. Shocked by the magnitude of the disaster and the appalling number of casualties, SIF staff members were mobilised immediately. Within hours, a team was organised and set out for Haiti. An initial financial commitment was made from SIF's own resources and an appeal was launched to our private donors requesting their help for responding to the emergency.

For SIF staff members, the relevance of immediate reaction was very clear. Intervention in Haiti was in line with SIF's mission, value and principles that entail providing relief and assistance according to humanitarian needs, regardless of origin, gender or belief. Haiti was far from being the first non-Muslim country where our organisation had taken action.

Like in any other humanitarian organisation at the time, staff members were called back from their vacations, extra help was required and all energies were mobilised in the different departments. At times, the whole staff would gather in the central office space, standing around the phone receiver, eager to hear the latest news when one of our staff members in the field could manage to spare a few minutes to tell us all how things were going over there. It was obvious that everybody shared the same spirit and concern regarding the events.

For most of our private donors, giving money to provide relief assistance to earthquake victims in Haiti just seemed a natural thing to do, and SIF, just like other NGOs, benefitted from a significant surge of generosity, fostered by the intensity of media coverage for the crisis. Some donors did ask questions about the number of Muslims in Haiti. Staff members in charge of liaising with donors would then simply explain the organisation's principles of action. Most of these persons were easy to convince. They quickly accepted the idea that the issue was not about the number of Muslims in Haiti, but rather about the magnitude of the suffering for all the people affected by the disaster. SIF has always made a great effort to raise awareness and explain the universal meaning of the act of giving in Islam.

This capacity to appeal to donors within the Muslim community in France constitutes a strong added value for humanitarian action in general: firstly because our donors give very generously, giving us the capacity to start our action without waiting for the certainty of institutional funding; and secondly because they can be responsive to disasters that are less appealing to other types of donors (the recent crisis in Pakistan is of course a striking example of this).

From a general point of view, the intensity of media coverage did benefit SIF since it induced our usual donors to give to an organisation they knew and trusted. However, it was frustrating to observe that, despite the fact that SIF was able to provide quick and early response on the ground (we started our distributions of water as soon as the 20th of January), SIF tended to be ignored by the media compared with other humanitarian actors of similar size, scope and mandate. And indeed, the Haiti crisis is not the only occasion where SIF has been treated by the media as a different category of organisation. Thus, at the peak of Haiti crisis, SIF was hardly mentioned by the main media covering the disaster. However, our intervention in Haiti was later mentioned out of the blue in an article published on the Gaza flotilla- an event in which SIF was in no way involved. The contrast with the amount of media attentions we currently receive in relation to the Pakistan crisis is striking and clearly shows that there is a long way still to go before the media notice and understand our action in non-Muslim countries.

As for institutional donors, at the very beginning the SIF intervention in Haiti was perceived somewhat differently by institutions with funding decisions decentralised in field offices compared to donors based in Europe. The former were immediately willing to fund us, as with any stakeholder actually implementing useful humanitarian activity on the ground. The latter had difficulties at first to understand that SIF's added value was not limited to Muslim countries and that it made sense to support an actor who had the capacity to bring concrete and adequate assistance to people in Haiti. Fortunately, obstacles were quickly lifted, and the mutual confidence built over the years with

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our partners in Europe eventually allowed us to benefit from significant amounts of additional funding for pursuing and expanding our emergency activities.

On the ground, SIF presence went without saying for most humanitarian partners, starting with our fellow humanitarian organisations from Coordination Sud (French NGO platform) and VOICE. But, among all the humanitarian and civil protection actors who were camping out in the garden of the French embassy in Port-au-Prince, were a number of persons who perhaps knew us less. Members of our first emergency team reported that the initial distance and caution towards them was unmistakable. Some people were clearly wondering why on earth a Muslim faith-based organisation would do anything in a non-Muslim country. An interesting question - but is one applied just as naturally to Christian faith-based organisations working in Muslim countries? Rapidly though, the ice was broken between the inhabitants of the French embassy garden thanks to dialogue and cohabitation: it's difficult to keep your distance when you queue for the same shower every morning and are bitten by the same mosquitoes every night.

In the end, the Haitian disaster did prove once more that the added value of diversity reaches far beyond the Muslim/non-Muslim divide and that such categorisation of actors is not only short-sighted, but also irrelevant to humanitarian action. For one thing, Haitians are very attached to expressing their faith, and religiosity is extremely strong there, all the more so after the earthquake. Due to SIF history and cultural background, and also due to our mode of recruitment, SIF expatriate staff in the field are from very diverse origins and beliefs, certainly more than is the case for most international NGOs. Thus, the individuals working for SIF are more likely than others to accept and understand the religious beliefs of others. They are also more likely to be used to working with people who think and act differently from themselves. This has proved a real advantage on various occasions in Haiti (and elsewhere) for liaising adequately with communities. This diversity in our teams certainly poses a number of challenges to be

overcome in terms of management. But it is an invaluable asset for humanitarian action.

One thing is certain, the local staff members that we hired there were simply proud to join our organisation and to work with us towards providing relief to their fellow Haitians. It was obvious they did not feel obliged to change their attitude or behaviour to comply with the religious reference in our name. Because, as one of our Haitian program assistant puts it in his usual morning greetings: "Avec Jesus, tout va bien"¹.

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'The Haitian disaster proved once more that the added value of diversity reaches far beyond the Muslim/non-Muslim divide'

1. "With Jesus, all is fine".

GETTING CHILDREN INVOLVED IN DISASTER RISK REDUCTION: MAKING HAITI'S 2010 POST DISASTER NEEDS ASSESSMENT SMART AND JUST

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'Children reported that the education curriculum does not include Disaster Risk Reduction - a regrettable omission in a country so vulnerable to so many hazards.'

★ Based on Plan International's firsthand experience, it is clear that children and young people can generate real, tangible, positive impacts towards reducing the risk of disasters. And it is their right to do so. Through active lobbying and policy advocacy, children can challenge the way in which local, national and international authorities view children's role in disaster management. In taking action for disaster risk reduction (DRR) children have effectively raised awareness about DRR and contributed to building resilience to disasters in their communities. With high levels of energy, creativity and enthusiasm, children and young people can effectively identify and communicate risk. Children's participation in the Haiti earthquake's Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) is a case in point of how children, when granted a space to engage, can make effective contributions to decision making which affects their safety and well being.

★ HAITI: 2010 EARTHQUAKE¹

Over two weeks in February and March 2010, Plan International, in partnership with UNICEF, facilitated 54 focus group discussions with 1000 children and young people across Haiti. Eighteen facilitators were trained on the PDNA

CHILD-FRIENDLY METHODOLOGIES FOR PDNAS²

A number of child-friendly participatory methodologies can be used to help children affected by a disaster communicate their feelings, concerns and ideas. Recognising that children's perspectives are different from those of adults, and that many children lack the skills and means to express themselves, these tools make use of visualisation and drawing.

Through the body map tool, for example, children focus attention on an anonymous child (whose body's outline they have drawn on a large flipchart) and are guided through a series of questions to share information on the impact of the disaster on this imaginary child. The body map uses different body parts to address potentially sensitive issues, such as abuse, violence, loneliness and fear. Starting with the head, children are asked what they are thinking about, worrying about or feeling happy about, and whether the way adults think about children has changed. Focusing on the eyes, are there changes in the way children see their world, communities, families and themselves? Are there any changes in the way adults see children? For the ears, children are asked if there have been any changes in what they hear, and how adults listen to them. With the mouth, are there any changes in the way children speak, or adults speak to them? For the heart, are there any changes in the way children feel, and adults feel about them? For the hands and arms, are there changes in what activities children do, and the way adults treat them? For the feet and legs: any changes in where they go and cannot go?

process, and received refresher training on child rights including protection and participation. Gender-disaggregated focus groups were held with three age groups, 5-10, 11-16, and 17-24.

Focus groups allowed most children their first formal opportunity to share with their peers how the earthquake had affected them. It also gave them the space to debate the priorities for the reconstruction process. The children were encouraged to express their hopes and dreams for the future of their country, and identify specific contributions they could offer. This was more than a formal question and answer exercise. In accordance with the official Haiti PDNA, the wide discussions covered the social sector (including education and health services), infrastructure, production/ the economy, and governance and security.

★ THE REALITY OF LIFE FOR HAITI'S CHILDREN

In the focus groups children shared how access to good-quality education was already a major problem before the quake. Schools were in poor condition, inadequately resourced and staffed, and fees were too high for most people to afford. Education is a priority for them in the rebuilding of their country. Prior to the earthquake, only half of Haitian children attended primary school, less than a quarter attended pre-school and 83% of all schools were non-public, many of them poorly regulated and supervised. The national literacy rate was under 53%.

Children emphasised the importance of schools for restoring routine and normality following the trauma of the earthquake. One nine-year-old said: "I dream of a new Haiti, where children go to school... I have dreamed another Haiti where I go to school and meet my friends and teachers. I miss them so much". Children also stressed the need for safe schools. A girl described her experience: "When the earthquake occurred, I was in the schoolroom. I thought the building was collapsing. I fell down the stairs and I was rescued down there. Thank God, I was not seriously injured. Since then I stay at home doing nothing. I would really like schools to be rebuilt".

"We will be Haiti's future"

Consultation in DRR helps young people understand how governments and civil society

'Investing in young people's knowledge and skills will save lives and minimise losses.'

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interact, and how government and the international humanitarian community can work together for reconstruction. As an 18-year-old girl said: "Children and young people must find the necessary psychosocial support and must participate in rebuilding the country to avoid stress. We want to work. We want jobs". Even 13-year-olds want to be engaged: "I could participate in cleaning activities in my village - there is so much garbage everywhere". With a clear vision of a resilient future, these girls challenge the stereotype that sees children as victims; they want to be heard and involved.

Whilst children should not be seen only as victims in the face of disaster, their protection remains a priority. This was also highlighted by the focus group discussions in Haiti. Children spoke of an upsurge in insecurity following the earthquake and were determined that this should be addressed, particularly in temporary camps where the risk of violence, abuse and trafficking is high: "After the earthquake, I slept outside the house, but because of bandits and thieves, we had to go back inside the house" (17-year old girl).

★ DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

In Haiti, the group discussions stressed that preparedness and prevention should be a central aspect of the rebuilding process. Children reported that the education curriculum does not include DRR - a regrettable omission in a country so vulnerable to so many hazards. Nonetheless, they knew that environmental damage, inadequate natural resource management and deforestation were making them even more vulnerable to disasters such as floods and landslides.

★ CONCLUSION: SMART AND JUST

Vulnerability to disasters arises from a variety of sources, including social exclusion and lack of consultation. This is especially the case for children. Given the escalation in the number of disasters, and the increasing numbers of children affected, it is imperative that the humanitarian and development communities embrace children's capacity to contribute to reducing risk through participation in disaster prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery and rehabilitation.

Investing in children's participation in disaster

PLAN INTERNATIONAL AND CHILD-CENTRED DRR

From Haiti to Indonesia, Plan has observed children's invaluable role as agents for change in communicating risks, identifying vulnerability and taking part in planning and implementation for disaster preparedness and risk reduction.

Children and young people in El Salvador and in the Philippines for example are contributing to building the resilience of communities to prepare, cope and prevent disasters. In El Salvador a youth committee contributed to an effective community evacuation during hurricane Ida³. In the Philippines, children at a school in Southern Leyte vulnerable to landslide risks successfully led their schools relocation to safer grounds⁴.

risk management will ensure an innovative and effective humanitarian approach to tackle the increasing disasters affecting today's and future generations. Investing in young people's knowledge and skills will save lives and minimise losses. It will also address disaster-related setbacks affecting poverty reduction which is pertinent to achieving Millennium Development Goals.

For Haiti, including children in DRR will ensure that this major stakeholder group is engaged in building back better and building resilience for the future. This in turn will contribute significantly to their recovery from trauma and loss.

Haiti's official PDNA set the price for reconstruction at \$11.5 billion. The findings from our consultations with a small sample of Haiti's children and young people illustrate how they can contribute to decisions about how this money is used, monitored and accounted for. The reconstruction process must address children's priorities if it is to have long-term benefits. Children and young people in Haiti are ready to learn and take part in making theirs a better future.

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1. The report from the Child-Centred PDNA is available at www.plan-uk.org/pdfs/haiti_report_final.pdf
2. These tools are adapted from Action for the Rights of Children (ARC) resource pack 2009 <http://www.arc-online.org>
3. See: www.youtube.com/watch?v=SmesBo54Wh8
4. See: www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdEYFjJl0

THE INVOLVEMENT OF INTERNATIONAL MEDIA AND MILITARY IN THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE IN HAITI

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The OCHA financial tracking system reports a total humanitarian assistance to Haiti of more than USD 3.3 billion as of 17 September 2010, and USD 1.1 billion pledged but not yet committed. In other words, the earthquake in Haiti has triggered what can be probably called the largest humanitarian operation and largest amount of funding ever known for a single country¹. Besides the classical humanitarian actors (UN, Red Cross/Red Crescent movement and NGOs- most of whom already worked in Haiti well before the earthquake), many other actors have been involved in the overall humanitarian response. Amongst them, there were two actors with prominent roles: the media and foreign military.

★ THE MEDIA

It is difficult to estimate how many media teams were deployed in Haiti to cover the aftermath of the earthquake, but presumably they were in their hundreds. The media played a major role in Haiti with videos, reports and articles making the headlines of the press worldwide for weeks. One highly positive consequence of such coverage has been the international private solidarity, raising more than 37% of the total funding for humanitarian assistance. In other words, private funding has been the major donor in Haiti. Individuals, companies and other private organisations have helped enormously by giving money to alleviate suffering and to cover immediate needs on the ground. The importance of such media coverage is clear if you compare it to other situations with less coverage, where the level of private solidarity demonstrated is very different.

On the other hand, the media also widely criticised the humanitarian response. Particularly in the earliest phases, articles put into question the pace of the response, which was considered too slow, as well as the role and speed of the UN as a coordination body. Insecurity and incidents of looting were also common topics reported by press correspondents.

And indeed, there is a need for increased speed and coordination in humanitarian response. Still, the general impression that one could get from the media coverage is not the full picture. Despite the fact that the earthquake created heavy logistical bottlenecks and strongly affected the capacity of organisations already working in

the country before the quake, humanitarian actors managed to set up organised emergency distributions of water, food, relief items and medical assistance. They mobilised experienced and qualified staff worldwide to participate in the response. Moreover, even if their warehouses and offices had collapsed, many established NGOs were able to provide emergency assistance in Port-au-Prince *immediately* after the earthquake. Therefore, when discussing the situation with humanitarian workers coming back from Haiti, common words were: *"The needs were overwhelming, and the logistics a nightmare. It was really hard, but we did our best to deliver fast"*. Many of these efforts were underreported.

Coordination was another issue often questioned by the media. Obviously, the earthquake swept away the capacity of the Government of Haiti to coordinate such a massive international response. In those cases, most of the coordination responsibility is put in the hands of the UN, through the Humanitarian Coordinator, UNOCHA and the clusters system². As a result, in the case of Haiti, the UN was responsible for coordination but they were criticised quite a lot. While acknowledging that there are still pending challenges, I would like to highlight that UNOCHA and all humanitarian organisations have made relevant real advancements in coordination mechanisms during the last few years. Not so long ago, the coordination of humanitarian aid after natural disasters was certainly weaker and less integrated. It is especially since the 2004 tsunami that the humanitarian sector has dedicated specific effort to improving the coordinated response to large-scale disasters. There is now, for example, a cluster system and dedicated personnel to coordinate the different sectors. Despite these on-going improvements, it is still a challenge to coordinate such massive operations, partly due to the fact that a lot depends on the capacity and willingness of each humanitarian organisation present to participate in the clusters.

★ FOREIGN MILITARY

Everybody remembers the pictures of US helicopters landing in the grounds of the presidential palace in Port-au-Prince, as part of an operation to ensure order and to facilitate distribution of relief items in the

'Humanitarian organisations are, in most of the cases, both better placed and experienced to deliver emergency aid'

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capital after the earthquake. European military units were also involved in the response to the quake. This kind of involvement is not new, as it seems that western governments and politicians are increasingly interested in deploying military units to disaster situations. And generally speaking, a large majority of European citizens probably approve of these military deployments. The reason behind this support is that they believe that their armed forces are doing something useful, namely helping people affected by natural disasters. A similar popular support is probably given to militaries participating in UN Peacekeeping operations (UNPKOs), although the majority of the European citizens may not realise that the top ten contributors of uniformed personnel to those missions are actually Asian and African nations (Bangladesh, Pakistan and India being the top three contributors by far).

Leaving aside complex emergencies and UNPKOs, the deployment of foreign militaries to natural disaster situations (such as Haiti) is becoming more frequent, particularly for large scale disasters and, of course, only at the request of the affected country for such an intervention. For such cases, there is a framework that guides the use of civil defence and foreign military assets in relief operations, commonly known as 'the Oslo Guidelines'. Besides the importance of the humanitarian principles³, there are two other relevant aspects of these Guidelines to keep in mind for any such operation: a) these civil defence and foreign military assets should be considered as a last resort, namely if there is no civilian capacity to meet a critical need⁴ and b) to the extent possible, military organisations should not provide any direct assistance. The Oslo Guidelines are the only agreed-upon model for the use of these assets in natural disasters and many states have collaborated in their creation and updating. However, as they are not legally binding, the Guidelines have often been rather disregarded or ignored in the field.

There is another relevant issue related to today's military involvement in disaster response: the cost. Let me mention the recent example of Spain, which is the sixth biggest contributor to humanitarian aid in Haiti according to OCHA. The cost of the Spanish Hispaniola operation (navy ship for 3 months, 450 military, and arrival to Petit-Goave on February 4) has been

€ 18.24 million. This amounts to 30.3% of the *total* humanitarian aid budget in Spain. UN humanitarian agencies like WFP or UNICEF received significantly less funding from the Spanish government than the cost of this military deployment, not to mention the percentage of funding channelled through NGOs... Surely the work of the military operation has been useful for the Haitian population, but was this operation really cost effective if compared to what the humanitarian sector would have been able to accomplish with such an amount?

While the support provided by foreign military may be useful under certain circumstances in natural disasters, as everyone knows, the *raison d'être* of the military is *not* to provide humanitarian assistance. Therefore, the involvement of foreign armies should follow the set of rules developed in the Oslo Guidelines and its cost should be well justified. Visibility is not the utmost priority when delivering emergency humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian organisations (UN, Red Cross/Red Crescent movement and NGOs) are, in most of the cases, both better placed to deliver emergency aid and more experienced. And very often, they are already present in the area before the disaster strikes.

Pedro Luis Rojo
Director of Operations
Acción contra el Hambre
VOICE Board Member

<http://www.accioncontraelhambre.org/>

1. Despite the Sudan consolidated appeal 2010 (1.8 billion requested) and the recent revised emergency plan for Pakistan (over 2 billion requested), the Haiti response has been better covered by private and public donors.
2. The cluster approach aims to make the humanitarian response more predictable by introducing a system of sectoral coordination (e.g. health, education, protection, etc.) (<http://www.icva.ch/doc00004350.pdf>).
3. These are the principles of humanity, impartiality, independence, and neutrality, all of which are essential in the work of humanitarian organisations.
4. Lexicon and recommendations on humanitarian-military coordination: www.ngovoice.org/documents/CIV%20-%20MIL%20LEXICON%20FINAL%20MAY%202009.pdf.

'All humanitarian organisations have made relevant real advancements in coordination mechanisms during the last few years'

HAP AND SPHERE IN HAITI HELP ORGANISATIONS IMPROVE THEIR QUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

THE ISSUE - HAITI: THE NGO PERSPECTIVE

'As a resident of one of the camps in Petion Ville, Port-au-Prince commented "it is really important to know why [the NGO] is here; then we can tell if what they are doing is good or not. Without this information we cannot say.'

The January 12th earthquake sent millions of Haitians into over a thousand makeshift camps, and 9 months after the quake, that's where many remain. While there has been a massive response from the international community, the assistance that people have received has not always lived up to international quality and accountability standards.

When a 40 year-old mother in the Ti Savanne displaced persons camp of Port-au-Prince was asked in April about the role of NGOs in the camp, her response was unequivocal; "Before the earthquake, my friends and family were supporting me, my eight children and my disabled girl. Now, I don't know where they are. I don't have anything to survive on. I know NGOs are here in my camp, but I don't get any help and I have no idea what they do."

Given the size of the disaster and the sudden scaling-up that was needed by all agencies already on the ground, some may argue that the emergency phase is not a time for standards - 'anything is better than nothing.' But many have recognised that it is at exactly this time that there is a need for both quality and accountability to all stakeholders, but in particular to those affected by the disaster.

The Sphere Project's "Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response" have, since their inception in 1997, become a key quality benchmark for the humanitarian community, providing a set of standards and indicators to further articulate the core principle of the humanitarian movement: the right to life with dignity. Sphere identifies minimum quality standards and indicators in 4 key technical sectors: Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion; Food Security, Nutrition and Food Aid; Shelter, Settlement and Non-Food Items; and Health Services, complemented by a number of core 'process and people' standards that are relevant to each of the technical sectors. A new version of the Sphere Handbook, to be launched in 2011, will include additional Protection principles.

Complementing The Sphere Project, recent years have seen the emergence of a number of accountability initiatives, with HAP, the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, among the best known. The HAP 2007 Standard establishes 6 key benchmarks for ensuring that humanitarian assistance is accountable to

those they seek to assist, and is delivered to high standards of quality. These benchmarks aim to reduce the power imbalances that exist between agencies and people affected by disasters through ensuring that agencies share basic information, enable representative participation of groups with diverse needs, and identify safe and effective means to receive and handle complaints. The benchmarks also focus on ensuring that agencies have a quality management system that enables the implementation of their quality and accountability commitments.

Aid agencies in Haiti admit that attaining Sphere and HAP standards in Haiti has been difficult, as they are faced with numerous obstacles that make this disaster response uniquely challenging. In the first days after the disaster, aid agency personnel struggled even to meet the standards for their own staff.

★ PRACTICAL SUPPORT WITH STRENGTHENING QUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Shortly after the Haiti earthquake, DanChurchAid¹ took the initiative to establish a local resource capacity to promote the quality and accountability of the earthquake response through the deployment of experts in HAP and Sphere standards to Port- au- Prince. The effort² included activities such as training and coaching for humanitarian agencies in the standards, practical hands-on support with implementing better practice at project sites, raising awareness and advocating on issues of quality and accountability, facilitating the sharing of best practice amongst implementing agencies, and supporting Haitian civil society and government actors to engage in an informed dialogue with humanitarian actors on issues of quality and accountability.

One problem agencies have struggled with has been the spontaneous nature of most of the camps, with informal committees claiming to represent camp residents that may not be truly representative, but nevertheless becoming entrenched in the response. A concrete example of one key success for the HAP team has been the development of a tool for assessing camp committees that can be used by agencies to understand how representative and effective they are, enabling the agencies to make an

'With increased pressure on agencies to show impact and effectiveness, it is important to remember that it is not just the number of beneficiaries reached that is important, but the way in which agencies work with them to achieve results.'

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informed decision about how they should work with these committees and ensure accountability to the populations they serve.

★ COLLABORATION AND INNOVATION - JOINT COMPLAINTS HANDLING

Another innovative area of HAP intervention has been the support to agencies in developing a joint complaint and response mechanism with the Lutheran World Federation, Save the Children and World Vision. This joint mechanism aims to provide a number of channels through which beneficiaries and community members can raise complaints connected to the activities of the three NGOs working with their camp. This may include complaints about the quality of work, mistakes made, or improper staff behaviour; issues that NGOs interested in quality and accountability want to identify quickly. While individual agency complaints mechanisms are becoming more common, joint mechanisms are less common, though they are more user friendly, and reduce confusion compared to each NGO setting up its own mechanisms.

★ REALISING THE POTENTIAL OF STANDARDS - OPPORTUNITIES FOR GREATER USE IN ADVOCACY

Rosaria Iraola, the current Sphere focal point in Haiti, has encountered an overwhelming demand for training and capacity building in Sphere standards. While the Sphere Project is well-known in the humanitarian sector, it does not mean that the application of the standards and indicators in Haiti has been easy. Rosario: "The head of one very large humanitarian agency told me that they doubted the relevance of Sphere standards in this context, as it wasn't a 'real' emergency. To me this is shocking; the heart of Sphere is the right to life with dignity and the rights-based approach. That's universal."

It is clear that most camps in Haiti are simply not living up to many of the technical indicators of quality, such as the number of square meters per dwelling in a camp, or in some cases the number of latrines. That has led some agencies to mistakenly shrug off the standards as 'inapplicable' in Haiti. This is exactly where the Sphere focal point has played a positive

role; in helping agencies to understand the difference between standards and indicators, and in helping to contextualise the indicators so that they are relevant for the Haitian context. Perhaps equally important, the Sphere focal point has been able to raise awareness of the negative consequences of not attaining the indicators. Rosario adds, "We know that the government also has a role to play in managing the response, and Sphere is an excellent tool for advocacy. It's one of the key uses of Sphere. But agencies could be using it more."

★ LOOKING FORWARD

With increased pressure on agencies to show impact and effectiveness, it is important to remember that it is not just the number of beneficiaries reached that is important, but the way in which agencies work with them to achieve results. A focus on quality and accountability will ultimately lead to programmes that are better tailored to people's needs, are more efficient, and achieve better results.

The one year anniversary of the Haiti earthquake is fast approaching, and hordes of journalists will soon descend on Haiti to file their stories. What will they make of the camps still full of the displaced? And what kind of questions should they - and we, the humanitarian community - be asking about the response?

The work of HAP and the Sphere focal points in Haiti can surely contribute to the answer. Their work is about helping humanitarian agencies, affected communities, Haitian government and civil society actors confront the difficult questions from a common frame of reference, and ensure that the quality and accountability of the humanitarian response remain priorities for all.

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1. DanChurchAid is an ACT Alliance agency and a certified HAP member.
2. The teams in Haiti were hosted by the RedR and Bioforce Disaster Response Support Service (DRSS) project.

Interview with Michèle Striffler: THE HAITI HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE AND EU HUMANITARIAN POLICY

A VIEW ON THE EU

The position of Standing Rapporteur for Humanitarian Aid was established by the European Parliament in 2006 in order to enhance the EP's position on humanitarian aid issues. The first Rapporteur was Thierry Cornillet, who was followed by Michèle Striffler in 2009.

This interview by VOICE took place in the office of Ms. Striffler on 15 September 2010.

- **How do you perceive your role as the Humanitarian Rapporteur of the Development Committee in the European Parliament?** The role of the European Parliament, and my role specifically, is to check whether policy is really implemented in the field, and that funds really reach the organisations and governments who need it. As the Humanitarian Rapporteur, I am the contact point between NGOs, the Commission and the EP.
- **NGOs are the main implementers of humanitarian aid. Have you had the opportunity to meet NGOs in the field?** Yes, we went for example to Burkina Faso, where we met with ECHO partner organisations as well as local NGOs, visiting schools and a refugee camp. In June we went to Gaza with UNRWA and visited what we could. The biggest need there seemed to be not just the financial means but also the raw building materials. In addition, we went to Angola and of course Haiti. In all those places, we have spoken to a lot of humanitarian actors, including NGOs and the Red Cross.
- **Why do you think it is important to visit the field?** Well, as you know, the reality is never the same as what we see in the media. It is important to go on to the field especially for me, as this is what European citizens expect from MEPs. NGOs are working really hard but people are not sufficiently aware of this. People always believe that things could be done quicker, better, and tend to think that the money has just disappeared! So I inform them that it is not true and explain the technical problems encountered and so on. As a MEP, I really say what I think after these visits. Moreover, field visits give me a real feel for the situation and I think one is more effective when confronted with the situation up close. I think that every person who has been elected has to go out to the field that is relevant for his/her mandate. An elected representative who does not do this out-of-touch with reality.
- **Do you have other trips planned?** Yes, we plan to go to Kenya, Kivu, and the Sahel, if security allows it, as well as to Pakistan. I want to go to the most difficult places, but it is not useful for me to go in the early stage of the emergency. I am not a doctor nor an NGO, so

my visit that early on would just be useless and bothersome. It is more the Commissioner's job to go. I prefer to go at a later stage, to see how the response is organised and what can be done to improve it.

- **What are your main impressions and concerns from your visit to Haiti?** What struck me most when I was there was the complete lack of mechanical diggers to remove the rubble. Even if that problem would be easy to resolve, the biggest problem is land. No one knows what to do with the rubble as the government does not own any land and seems too weak to take initiatives to solve these land issues. As a result, for NGOs it is difficult to work on reconstruction. And since there will soon be elections, the government will likely not be inclined to do anything. That is very worrying for the population. Another issue is the Interim Commission, which is really inefficient. When I was there, they only started to talk about the organisation of that body. I was really disappointed. The Commissioner for development is now planning to organise meetings every 3 to 6 months to follow up the reconstruction of Haiti, and the functioning of the Interim Commission is certainly an issue to keep an eye on.
- **What do you think about the role of international NGOs in Haiti?** They have done an amazing job. We have visited a lot of places and seen their achievements. Moreover, whether it is in Haiti or elsewhere, I think NGOs are very courageous, since more and more of their staff are arrested or assassinated, so I admire these people.
- **Do you think that EU Member States take Disaster Risk Reduction and LRRD (Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development) sufficiently into account?** Until now, I don't think they have seen it as a priority. But Commissioner Georgieva talks a lot about this, and I think it will now move a lot. We are all aware that the response to the disaster in Chile was far better prepared than Haiti and therefore the earthquake there had a less catastrophic impact.
- **Now the focus of the media and of the public has moved away but the needs for reconstruction and rehabilitation are still huge. Will the Member States**

1. The Council's Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid.

A VIEW ON THE EU

hold to the commitments they have made? We have received a large amount of funding for Haiti, although it is true that we will need more. What we need is the media: they communicate a lot when the disaster strikes, but then they do not report back on what happens in the field. However, the media have a really important role to play in the future of the affected population, because without them we cannot manage to mobilise Member States or private donors. Maybe it would be a good idea to have an NGO focused solely on dealing with the media.

- **Is there really enough money reserved for the reconstruction phase?** A part of the money at EU level is blocked for reconstruction. Of all the money that was committed, 460 million euros, certainly not all is spent yet. Internationally, we cannot be sure that pledges will really be spent. Also for that reason the media have a role to play, making sure that this crisis is not forgotten. The biggest issue is that people do not know what happens with their money, even if it is well spent. I would like to see reports on the television in Europe about what has been spent and with what impact. It is so easy and this would motivate people to give and keep giving.
- **Pakistan has raised the issue of military engagement in humanitarian crises. What is your opinion on this issue?** My opinion is balanced. On the one hand, it would be good to avoid military engagement, as it may complicate the work of NGOs in terms of access for example. On the other hand, when we see how NGOs face high security risks in certain countries, the military could be helpful. For me, what is really important is that the NGOs and the military sit around the table and discuss to find a way to fulfil their roles in the same space. This is a decision that should be taken by them, not by the politicians or the EC, since the lives of NGO staff members depends on it. All arguments should be carefully considered, and decisions should be taken depending on the specific context in a certain country. The military has a totally different vision and approach to that of the NGOs, so that dialogue is essential.
- **You have advocated many times for a European Civilian Protection Force.**

What would be the added value for the affected population? It is especially for organisational purposes, since we have noticed many times that the EU could have been more efficient if it had coordinated better. Moreover, it is important for more visibility. Americans always seem to be everywhere but the EU provides a lot of aid as well and I think it is important that EU citizens become aware of this. If we had one coordinated European force, it would ensure a unique visibility under one flag, instead of internal competition between Member States.

- **What is your opinion about the creation of the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps (EVHAC)?** Like the NGOs, I am a bit sceptical. As I told you, when a crisis erupts, I don't go immediately to the field as I would be useless. I think such a Corps would also be an obstacle to NGO activities, unless they were professionals-professional doctors, firemen, etc. This could be very useful, as long as the system is very well organised. I think for reconstruction the EVHAC can actually even be more useful than for the emergency phase.
- **It is very important for NGOs that Member States do not instrumentalize humanitarian aid for other purposes, such as political and security objectives. How do you think we could safeguard the Humanitarian Principles?** It is hard to impose on Member States what they should do. But if NGOs informed us with regards to particular problems in certain Member States, the European Parliament could raise those issues through a so-called Initiative Report. This is then transmitted to the Council and the Commission, just as has now happened with the Parliamentary report on the Roma. Moreover, these problems should also be discussed in COHAFA¹.
- **Do you have any advice for NGOs for their relations with the European Parliament?** Since the beginning of my mandate I have said that my door is open to NGOs. We need dialogue to exchange information and advice, and as transparently as possible. That is why I say to everybody: 'Let's put aside the protocol and work together'.

THE IMPACT OF THE BLOCKADE ON HOUSING IN GAZA

FIELD FOCUS

 While the world's media focus on the current round of political negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authorities, for people living in Gaza the situation on the ground remains unchanged. Despite recent reports of an easing of the now three-year old blockade by Israel and Egypt, the tangible effects of this development are minimal.

'If the policy of drip-feeding shelter materials into Gaza continues, it is estimated that it will take at least another 80 years to meet the current shelter and reconstruction needs.'

Even without the 6,280 damaged houses, which are not suitable for habitation as a result of the December 2008 'Operation Cast Lead', there were pre-existing serious conflict-related shelter needs in the Gaza Strip. 2,900 families already had their housing destroyed, with a further 5,611 refugee families living in derelict and unsanitary shelters. Due to natural population growth between 2006 and 2010, it is also estimated that a further 68,437 housing units are required to meet current housing needs. However, necessary building materials remain on the Israeli 'Dual Use List', which Israel categorises as materials liable to be used, side by side with their civilian purposes, for the development, production, installation or enhancement of military capabilities and terrorist capacities, and are therefore impossible to import into Gaza. Complicated procedures for the import and use of cement, steel and aggregates further impedes an appropriate shelter response. This particularly affects the caseload of extremely vulnerable families, including female-headed households and families with one or more parents with a severe physical or mental disability, all of whom still have nowhere to call home.

While the blockade has immediately led to non-availability of humanitarian housing materials, there have been other repercussions which carry political as well as humanitarian and donor consequences. The blockade has created a lucrative black market in goods- including shelter materials- smuggled through tunnels from Egypt. This black market has plunged the humanitarian community into an ethical quagmire. On the one hand, agencies can choose to meet humanitarian needs and immediately alleviate human suffering by purchasing 'illegal' imported tunnel materials available on the market; an option no European donor is willing to fund. On the other hand, agencies can

continue to engage in bureaucratic, opaque and lengthy negotiations with Israel for 'legal' materials; an option which leaves beneficiaries vulnerable with no shelter or security of tenure, and one so far only undertaken by the UN and a handful of NGOs with the financial and human capacity to meet the bureaucratic requirements.

A second repercussion is that while the entry of building materials remains severely restricted, the vast majority of the repair and rehabilitation activities which have taken place since the beginning of the blockade have depended on stop-gap cash assistance. A major cost for UNRWA¹, for example, is their ongoing programme to support 2000 families with rent subsidy. While this is a useful emergency intervention, it is unsustainable, especially in areas where the rental market is already saturated. Rebuilding destroyed homes and communities, including access to services like education and health, should be the priority. To date, 47,201 houses with minor damage (less than €3800), have been identified and repaired. However, the vast majority of these repair and rehabilitation activities have depended on cash assistance and often used a combination of recycled materials from war-damaged houses and the limited tunnel materials available on the market. This does not constitute a durable solution for affected families or for donors.

Shelter material supplies that have been allowed through in recent weeks remain restricted to United Nations projects started prior to the blockade, and even this is just a drop in the ocean of what is needed. If the policy of drip-feeding shelter materials into Gaza continues, it is estimated that it will take at least another 80 years to meet the current shelter and reconstruction needs. Furthermore, if the policy of favouring the UN over NGOs continues, this will have a detrimental impact on the quality of assistance provided to beneficiaries. For all needs to be covered, *all* humanitarian organisations need to be included in a coordinated and appropriate response that is needs-responsive rather than access-responsive. There is much work to be done, particularly in the areas of water and sanitation, protection, legal assistance and durable solutions, on which NGOs have specialised expertise.

THE IMPACT OF THE BLOCKADE ON HOUSING IN GAZA

FIELD FOCUS

'Durable solutions start with families feeling empowered enough to reconstruct by themselves on their own land.'

The ongoing blockade is worsening an already bad situation. Families are unable to support themselves by livelihoods activities outside of Gaza and are, in some cases, completely dependent on aid. In the absence of the possibility for people to leave Gaza, the blockade is also putting a lot of stress on families who are hosting those who lost their homes. This presents a myriad of protection issues and leads to both the long term degradation of the housing stock and an overburdening of the already weak infrastructure networks. For some families, the black market can provide an interim solution if they can afford it, but for the most vulnerable families who do not have the means to reconstruct by themselves, even the black market is out of reach. Durable solutions start with families feeling empowered enough to reconstruct by themselves on their own land. Lifting the restrictions on humanitarian shelter materials will be the first step in achieving that.

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1. United Nations Relief Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Near East.

HUMANITARIAN ISSUES AT EU LEVEL

VOICE AT WORK

- ★ **Exchanging with Commissioner Georgieva and her Cabinet** - VOICE, as the main NGO interlocutor to the EU on humanitarian aid, met already three times with the Commissioner and her cabinet in the last few months. The VOICE President Mr. Eberwein met with Ms. Georgieva on June 22 to have a first exchange on issues of common interest. During this and the following meetings, issues raised by VOICE included the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps (EVHAC), the work of COHAFA, the visibility of EU Humanitarian Aid, the role of NGOs and the importance of the European Consensus for Humanitarian Aid. VOICE very much welcomes this regular exchange.
- ★ **VOICE influences three EC Communications** - In the aftermath of the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU is looking into ways to improve its ability to respond to crises. ECHO is preparing three Communications during autumn and the 86 members of the VOICE network are considered major stakeholders in the consultation process leading up to these. Concerning the Communication on Reinforcing the EU's Disaster Response Capacity, VOICE recommendations included: 1) civil protection has to be complementary to humanitarian aid; 2) the need for clear mandates and roles of the different actors; 3) to strengthen already existing crisis capability tools and mechanisms rather than create new bodies; 4) EC needs to facilitate coordination between member states civil protection contributions, contributing to better visibility of the EU response. VOICE is also engaged in the EVHAC consultations, and gave a welcomed speech at the ECHO Stakeholders conference on September 30, stressing the professionalism of the sector, the need for clear and realistic objectives of the EVHAC and the need for additional funding to set it up. The third Communication is on the Mid-term review of the Action Plan of the Humanitarian Consensus.
- ★ **Providing the perspective of humanitarian NGOs for the Mid-term review of the Action Plan of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid** - The VOICE network considers the Consensus and its Action Plan as the cornerstone of EU humanitarian aid policy. During summer, VOICE has given a consolidated answer based on members' field expertise and experiences. This was requested both by the Humanitarian Rapporteur of the EP and of DG ECHO. Key aspects that need more attention are (1) the promotion of IHL and the specificity of humanitarian aid, (2) humanitarian-military relationships, (3) the strengthening of partnership with a diversity of humanitarian actors, (4) Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and capacity building of local partners and (5) support to effective LRRD (Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development). The Mid-Term review of the Consensus Action Plan represents a good opportunity to reconfirm the validity of the principles of the European Consensus for Humanitarian Aid.
- ★ **Being involved in humanitarian aid issues in the European Parliament (EP)** - On various occasions, VOICE has given input to the work of the EP. In June, VOICE briefed the Humanitarian Rapporteur on NGO concerns before an EP delegation visited Haiti. Ms. Striffler confirmed to be committed to follow up the reconstruction process (see also interview in this issue). At the start of the new parliamentary year, VOICE was invited to the DEVE committee meeting on Pakistan, together with the IFRC, ICRC, UNICEF and UNOCHA, where Commissioner Georgieva gave an update on her visit to Pakistan. VOICE stressed the need to turn pledged funding into cash more quickly, the need to pay more attention to protection and the importance of education in emergency.
- ★ **Briefing ACP ambassadors on the challenges of humanitarian response** - On June 1, VOICE was invited to brief more than 130 ACP Ambassadors on the specificity and new challenges of humanitarian aid. Other speakers included the World Bank, FAO, WFP and DG ECHO. VOICE discussed several challenges linked with humanitarian interventions in fragile states and stressed the importance of the role of affected states in 1) enabling humanitarian actors to access needy populations, 2) ensuring a greater respect of the Humanitarian Principles and 3) engaging in DRR activities. This point was warmly welcomed by the audience. Other issues raised included the added value of NGOs, the importance of working together with local authorities and actors, and of LRRD.



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VOICE out loud

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