NGO VOICE

N E W S L E T T E R

VOICE out loud 16

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FOCUS: What is accountability in humanitarian aid?

From the VOICE Secretariat

In the search for quality humanitarian aid, the word 'accountability' is often mentioned in the same breath as 'effectiveness' and 'efficiency'. But what does it really mean?

For politicians and government employees, it entails checking that their humanitarian money is well spent. While this so-called 'upwards accountability' to **donors** is key, from the perspective of humanitarian NGOs this is by no means the only way that we seek to be accountable. VOICE members are also committed to be accountable to the **populations** they aim to assist. Moreover, as highlighted by one author in this edition, the beneficiaries' perspective should matter in the 'value for money' debate. Other articles look at how to ensure accountability towards each other **across the sector**, which way NGOs are accountable to their **staff**, and how to be accountable to the wider **public**, who support NGOs both directly and as taxpayers. Humanitarian NGOs are also exploring how to further improve the professionalization of the sector, as demonstrated in the articles on convergence of standards, certification and accountability of clusters. Lastly, we are happy to present **Germany's view as a donor** on humanitarian accountability.

Through this variety of articles, this newsletter aims to broaden the perspective on this important topic, and we hope it will stimulate actors involved in different parts of the humanitarian endeavour to think through their own accountability in the widest sense of the word.

In the 'View on the EU section', VOICE members reflect on the **EU discussion on 'resilience'**, while the 'Field Focus' sheds more light on the current **operational challenges in Mali**.

VOICE

VOICE stands for 'Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies'. It is a network representing 84 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 risk reduction. As a European network, it represents and promotes the values and specificities of humanitarian NGOs, in collaboration with other humanitarian actors.

AUSTRIA

- care
- Caritas Österreich
- Hilfswerk
- SOS-Kinderdorf International
- World Vision

DENMARK

- ADRA
- Danish People's Aid
- Folkekirkens Nødhjælp
- Danish Refugee Council
- Mission East
- Save the Children

GERMANY

- ADRA
- ASB Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund
- care
- caritas Germany
- Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe
- Die Johanniter Aus Liebe zum Leben
- Malteser International
- medico international
- Plan
- welt hunger hilfe
- World Vision

SWITZERLAND

- MEDAIR

THE NETHERLANDS

- care
- Cordaid
- icco
- Oxfam Novib
- World Vision
- ZOA Relief | Hope | Recovery

BELGIUM

- caritas international
- Handicap International
- Médecins du Monde
- Oxfam Solidariteit | Solidarité

FINLAND

- fida International
- Finn Church Aid actalliance
- World Vision

GREECE

- Médecins du Monde

UNITED KINGDOM

- Action Against Hunger
- actionaid international
- ADRA
- CAFOD just one world
- care
- christian aid
- International Medical Corps (UK)
- International Rescue Committee
- Islamic Relief
- Marie Stopes International
- MercyCorps
- MERLIN
- Oxfam
- Plan
- Save the Children
- tearfund
- World Vision
- HelpAge International

LUXEMBOURG

- caritas Luxembourg

NORWAY

- NRC Norwegian Refugee Council

CZECH REPUBLIC

- People in Need

FRANCE

- ACF
- ACTED
- care
- Caritas France Secours Catholique
- Handicap International
- Médecins du Monde
- Secours Islamique France
- Secours Populaire Français
- Solidarités
- tdf
- triangle

IRELAND

- Concern worldwide
- Trócaire Working for a Just World

PORTUGAL

- Médicos del Mundo

SPAIN

- Acción contra el Hambre
- Cáritas Española
- Médicos del Mundo
- Intermón Oxfam

SWEDEN

- Svenska kyrkan
- IAS
- PMU

ITALY

- Caritas Italiana
- cesvi
- CISP
- INTERSOS
- GVC

FROM THE VOICE PRESIDENT

That accountability is again on the agenda of donors, humanitarian practitioners and politicians is good news. But is the fact that accountability has been around as a central issue since the Rwanda genocide for close to 20 years also worrying? A lot has been achieved through Quality and Accountability Initiatives developed by operational NGOs, many of them VOICE members. However, much remains to be done. Viewed from the outside, there seems to be consensus on the importance of accountability, and with it transparency, of humanitarian work. Since the Tsunami in 2004, the humanitarian sector has witnessed a proliferation of accountability and quality standards and initiatives.

However, there are also undertones of irritation and impatience resulting from imbalances between ambitions, prevailing reality and what might be perceived as a good dose of lip service. So why is this so, if so much effort has been invested?

First and foremost because accountability is not an issue one can discover, address, throw required resources at, and in due time consider solved once and for all. Being committed to accountability is a continuous process which should drive the humanitarian endeavour rather than be a goal in itself. Thus it is a year in, year out constant climb, a never-quite-reached pass which occasionally offers the breathless humanitarian a broad view of where he comes from. The distance covered may not be huge, but the number of curves tackled and the elevation achieved are commensurate with the sweat.

Being an evolving target, what fresh perspectives might help define new facets requiring attention? After the Haiti earthquake in 2010 it seems now that the trend is rather towards consolidation with the Joint Standards Initiative and the SCHR initiative on certification. VOICE is closely following these developments, committed to ensure that its members' experience will help shape the future.

Over the years accountability has been mainly addressed according to the various constituencies having a claim over it. Thus the so-called 'upwards' accountability to donors still precedes by several lengths accountability to affected populations, and other stakeholders appearing along the way.

Some considerations which are critical for the success of the "quest for accountability" may deserve more attention. Firstly the full realisation that the tools necessary to ensure various accountability claims are (mostly) very different for different target audiences and thus demand considerable time and resource investment. Whereas gathering information for donor reports will rely heavily on financial and accounting skills, grasping outcomes for crisis-affected populations in the field will require both deep cultural understanding of the context and the particular skills needed to collect reliable data on social issues in foreign settings.

Even within the broad category of donors, what an allocating agency (ECHO, DFID, SIDA etc), a politician or European taxpayer expects varies considerably and will require very different inputs, ranging from the ability to pack essential messages into 180-second sound bites to providing semi-raw analytical data for other brains to dissect. Here lies one of accountability's main constraints: the more stakeholders, the greater the scope of needed professional skills and thus the more complex the requirements and the greater the resources needed.

Added complexity is also the cause of the regularly-voiced concerns regarding the proliferation of humanitarian accountability frameworks. As in many other matters, the question of whether a single imperfect standard would not be overall more effective than a dozen seeking both partial and in-depth rigour is a tough debate unlikely to go away. The risk of less effective accountability resulting from too many tools is real, even if such a varied crop has its technical advantages.

Because accountability is one of the keys to the quality of humanitarian interventions, it is at the core of VOICE raison d'être. Holding policymakers to account for the commitments they have made is less often discussed but just as critical an aspect as further downstream accountabilities. Are times of particularly shaky waters, such as those Europe and the EU are facing now, not precisely those when such accountability needs to be at the forefront? Moving towards common reporting for donors has been suggested as one way that the 'upwards' part of the accountability picture could be made less burdensome for NGOs and enable more resources to therefore be invested in 'downwards' accountability. Such debates should be continued, and VOICE hopes the varied articles of this edition will help to pave the way.

Nicolas Borsinger
President of VOICE

ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED POPULATIONS AND VALUE FOR MONEY

THE ISSUE- WHAT IS ACCOUNTABILITY IN HUMANITARIAN AID?

'Good accountability practices can incorporate community voices and opinions on how value for money can be defined.'

Value for money in humanitarian and development work is now widely discussed and debated in the sector. Christian Aid believes that women and men living in poverty are crucial in judging and assessing what value for money is. This judgement is more robust if those women and men play an integral part in rigorously analysing the vulnerabilities, risks and causes of the situations they are in. Good accountability practices can incorporate community voices and opinions on how value for money can be defined. Furthermore, being accountable often means that communities can help us to be more cost effective and use resources more efficiently as demonstrated in this article.

As an organisation certified by the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP)[i], Christian Aid is committed to ensuring that the communities we work with participate in programme planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. We try to ensure thorough contextual analysis via Participatory Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (PVCA). By using participatory approaches, communities identify the risks affecting them, the problems these risks bring, the sources of their vulnerability and the resources and skills they can use to overcome them. PVCAs get communities to analyse situations for themselves, which can include for example, market and gender analysis. This analysis feeds into an action plan which prioritises actions the community considers most important for them. This action plan can identify opportunities to influence relevant local or national authorities to support our projects- a good way to utilize resources outside of planned project costs funded by NGOs.

A good example of this can be seen in Eastern Kenya. Our local NGO partner worked with producers who had experienced continual crop failure over a five year period, partially due to inadequate rainfall and drought. Through the PVCA process an action plan was developed and a dam construction was prioritised as a solution to deliver water self-sufficiency and longer-term environmental and economic benefits to communities. The community action plan was used to influence the county government to support this. As a result, the agricultural machinery division of the Ministry of Agriculture at the county headquarters agreed to provide an earth-moving tractor to help with dam excavation and the regional Kenya Agricultural Research Institute agreed to offer technical support to introduce drought-tolerant crops and install small-scale irrigation kits for new demo plots.

We also strive to be transparent in terms of who we are and what we do. Sharing programme objectives, progress reports and financial summaries is part of the HAP transparency requirement and this information gives communities the opportunity to make informed decisions on how funds could be better utilized based on their local knowledge. When communities do this they can help us achieve the results they want to see by using fewer resources.

Transparency, information sharing and participation supports high quality cost effective programmes in both humanitarian and development work. Giving communities the right information can also prevent them from being coerced into paying unnecessary costs. For example in Burkina Faso, Christian Aid gave financial information to one community about a building repair project. When the contractor arrived wanting the village to supply sand and cement the village refused, knowing that the contractor had already been paid for the materials. If the community had not already known this information about the project they may have ended up paying. The contractor would have made a profit at the expense of the community.

Monitoring committees can check that the work is done on time and to a good standard. In Burkina Faso a new school was being funded by local government who contracted a local building company to do the work. Previously government contractors would be left unsupervised by government officials and this could cause problems as sometimes building work could be sub-standard and not finished on time. To address this problem the monitoring committee, made up of community members, were responsible for checking the quality of the work and they could also directly feedback to the government to challenge the quality of the work if they deemed it to be poor. The committee also oversaw the workers as they built the school to ensure that they worked the hours that they were contracted to do.

THE ISSUE- WHAT IS ACCOUNTABILITY IN HUMANITARIAN AID?

In emergency response work it can be more challenging to practice good accountability. This is particularly true in the very early stages after a disaster, when immediate needs are the primary concern. However, basic accountability practices should be, and can still be introduced in those early stages of response. This is our duty as agencies signed up to the Red Cross Code of Conduct. As principle 9 states, we hold ourselves accountable to those we seek to assist and from those we accept resources. A good example of practising accountability in emergency response can be seen from Christian Aid partners in Kenya. In drought-affected communities in northern Kenya, partners ensured that the community was involved in influencing decisions about possible interventions and they prioritised necessary actions, such as access to clean water. A Memorandum of Understanding was developed between our NGO partner and the community to record what had been agreed. In this way, both the community and the local NGO were clear on roles and responsibilities and the community was able to hold our partner to account from the outset of the response.

The importance of accountability to communities has climbed up the humanitarian and development agenda in recent years but it can take NGOs some time to get it right. This is often because it can be a long process for NGOs to institutionalise accountability practice into their work. Although there is a move towards greater accountability to communities this could still be further encouraged by donors. More flexible funding could be useful as this would allow communities to analyse and plan for themselves, setting their own development agenda rather than donors setting it for them. Donors could also reinforce an accountability culture by asking for more evidence on how accountability practices improve the quality of our work, measure value for money and cost effectiveness.

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[i] *HAP is an organisation that promotes accountability to people affected by humanitarian crises. The HAP standard helps organisations to design, implement, assess and improve and recognise accountable programmes.*

Can the humanitarian community come together to be accountable to those it seeks to assist?

Individual agencies are making progress towards being held accountable. The next challenge, however, is to ensure that an entire response is accountable and not just individual projects, programmes or agencies. In an attempt to address this issue, the Emergency Capacity Building (ECB) Project began an initiative to improve accountability to the communities we work with, within the context of the Cluster System . This project, funded by DG ECHO, includes training and the development of tools and guidance for clusters, as well as the promotion of accountability both to affected populations and between cluster members themselves.

So far we have conducted deployments to clusters in diverse locations such as Bolivia, Madagascar and Côte d'Ivoire. The deployments typically gather feedback from communities on their experiences of NGO accountability, and conduct workshops with cluster members to support their accountability practice.

The project has found that staff in cluster agencies generally understand the importance of accountability and are enthusiastic about it, but are often unclear on implementation. Gaps emerge as a result, such as cluster member agencies not having complaints and feedback mechanisms in place, and not sharing information (particularly financial) with communities. Accountability within the clusters can also help – if agencies are transparent about their approaches, and subsequent challenges, they can provide a more consistent service to communities.

Resources to help implement accountability are available on the ECB Project website, www.ecbproject.org/accountability, which will also host forthcoming tools to support accountability within the Cluster System.

Lucy Heaven Taylor (Programme Officer Accountability, Oxfam GB, http://www.oxfam.org.uk)
& Hugh Earp (ECB Shelter Accountability Advisor)

STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE BRINGS US ALL CLOSER TO THE GOAL

Keeping standards high across the humanitarian sector

THE ISSUE- WHAT IS ACCOUNTABILITY IN HUMANITARIAN AID?

'Subscribing to certain quality initiatives not only raises our own level of professionalism and provides external benchmarks for our operations, but it also helps us to contribute positively to the global humanitarian community'

How does a medium-sized, faith-based NGO with humble roots show that it can deliver high quality humanitarian aid interventions to the same standards as the world's large aid agencies? Is it enough to have a track record of effective programming and long-standing trusting relationships with supporters and communities? When we are working with new partners, new donors, or new communities, how do we maintain our standards and prove our credentials? And looking beyond ourselves, how does the humanitarian community as a whole protect its reputation and hold each other accountable to ever-better programming?

During the last ECHO Partners' Conference, Commissioner Georgieva[i] commented on the difficult circumstances for humanitarian actors in a time when funding is becoming increasingly scarce and criticism of aid work is more common. She called on the humanitarian community to defend our work, but reminded us that a good offense is the best defence. She suggested that "our offense is our excellence" and encouraged us to continue to strive for excellence.

Alongside many of our fellow NGOs, one of the ways Mission East attempts to strive for excellence is through subscribing to certain quality initiatives. Not only does this raise our own level of professionalism and provide external benchmarks for our operations, but it also helps us to contribute positively to the global humanitarian community. If the humanitarian community is viewed favourably by our governments, private supporters, media and the communities we seek to assist, then we all benefit. Conversely, when one organisation is discredited, it reflects badly on all. Having joint quality standards allows us to have a unified commitment to excellence, a unified stance towards those who challenge us, unified tools to improve and correct our actions, and a unified understanding of what 'good practice' really means.

Currently, Mission East, commits to two main quality initiatives and is about to take on a third. First, the *Sphere Standards* commits us to minimum technical requirements for emergency interventions in key sectors and to a collection of core operational principles (such as participation of affected populations, systematic assessment, and effective monitoring). Secondly, the *People in Aid* initiative provides us with high standards for people management and support. In an effort to further improve, Mission East has recently decided to become members of the *Humanitarian Accountability Project (HAP)* which promotes and monitors adherence to standards for beneficiary accountability in both relief and development interventions.

Mission East is committed to a high level of accountability and has made the decision to join the *HAP* initiative following a process of analysing the initiative against a number of criteria:

- Does the initiative help us do what we want to do better, and provide us with practical resources to get there? Are there any undesirable steps that it forces us to take?
- Does it make it easier for us to communicate externally about the standards that we meet and the efforts we make to work professionally?
- Do any of our donors use membership in this initiative as a criterion for funding our work?
- Do other agencies in our networks (e.g. EU-CORD and Integral Alliance) adhere to these standards and does it help the network if we use the same standards?
- What are the financial costs and administrative burden? Will these detract from our programmes in any way?

Moving forward, Mission East welcomes the new Joint Standards Initiative: a move to examine alignment of the three different quality initiatives of which Mission East is a part (*HAP*, *Sphere* and *People in Aid*). It is important for us, as a medium-sized NGO to be a part of global movements to promote and ensure quality in humanitarian programmes. Ultimately whatever helps the humanitarian community to provide assistance more efficiently and effectively to those in need is a benefit to us all.

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[i] *European Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, Kristalina Georgieva.*

An introduction to the Joint Standards Initiative (JSI)

HAP International, People In Aid and the Sphere Project are seeking to improve the quality and accountability of humanitarian action. We have embarked on an ambitious process that will look at the convergence of our Standards. This pioneering collaboration is called the Joint Standards Initiative and consists of a number of key components:

- **Consultation with a wide range of Stakeholders** over the next 6 months, to gather views on whether there is support for a joint standard and what a new joint standard might look like. The consultation will actively include voices from the Global South as well as NGOs, aid workers, UN, donors, academics etc. Methods to be used will include surveys, individual interviews, focus group discussions and a series of conferences.
- **JSI Working Group on Standards and Organisations** will be overseeing the consultation process, analysing the findings and offering recommendations to a 'Humanitarian Standards Forum' in Switzerland in May/June 2013. The Group is comprised of Board members from the 3 initiatives, representatives from the UN, donors, SCHR and independent experts. The group will also consider the wide range of options for the configuration of a joint standard and organisation.
- **The new website,** www.JointStandards.org was launched in April 2012 and provides access to the key standards in over 15 languages. This is a major step forward in bringing about greater coherence amongst standards and strengthening aid workers' ability to put these standards into practice.
- **JSI Governance -** The leadership of HAP, People In Aid and Sphere Project is responsible for the overall process as well as developing a final proposal to be approved by the respective governing Boards in 2013.

Contact Robert Schofield, JSI Coordinator at rschofield@jointstandards.org for more information.

Certification project of the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response

The humanitarian enterprise has grown dramatically over the last two decades. There are more NGOs, with more resources and more visibility. At the same time, the aid industry has faced a corresponding growth in criticism of its persistent weaknesses, including lack of professionalism, poor coordination, duplication and wasted resources. In response, the sector has developed a series of codes and standards to regulate itself. While these have gone some way to improve the quality and accountability of humanitarian assistance, there are limits to what can be achieved through self-regulation. As far back as 1996, the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda clearly stated that the development of standards is not enough: '"some form of regulation or enforcement is needed to ensure improvements in performance of NGOs". Ten years later, the evaluation of the tsunami response made a similar recommendation.

The Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR), a network that brings together nine of the major humanitarian organisations, decided in early 2012 to embark on a project that will look at how to design a certification system that could work for humanitarian organisations. It will build on both existing experiences in the sector, notably the HAP certification scheme as well as some approaches developed by donor governments, as well as mechanisms in other sectors.

While SCHR has not pre-determined the final outcome of the project, a number of principles have been agreed from the outset:

- The objective of a certification system must be the quality of the programmes
- The certification system must be flexible enough, so that smaller organisations are not de facto excluded from such a system
- The development of the certification system will be transparent and consultative

The project which will start on 1st October 2012 is planned for two years. A range of sector-wide consultations with humanitarian organisations will take place throughout the project. A very close collaboration with the Joint Standards Initiative (JSI) has already started and will be a key factor of success.

*For more details on the project itself or information on how to engage in the consultations, please contact the **SCHR Secretariat** at schr@ifrc.org*

NGO ACCOUNTABILITY TO DONORS

THE ISSUE- WHAT IS ACCOUNTABILITY IN HUMANITARIAN AID?

'The great majority of credible humanitarian organisations are devoting an ever-increasing amount of time and resources to ensure that we are increasingly transparent for the resources we are entrusted with'

What does accountability mean in the world of humanitarian action? One commonly used definition in the humanitarian sector as it pertains to accountability to our donors is *"the means by which individuals and organizations report to a recognized authority and are held responsible for their actions"*. As the aid sector has grown, and as fiscal constraints and current global economic conditions now put pressure on the availability of aid from many donors and funders, questions of effectiveness and accountability are increasingly prominent in the political and public debate in many donor countries.

Recent international agreements, such as the 2005 Paris Declaration, the 2008 Accra Agenda for Action, and the 2011 Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, have committed major donor countries to implementing a variety of measures aimed at increasing the effectiveness of aid, including improvements in mutual accountability, accountability to those intended to benefit from aid, and transparency.

As a humanitarian organisation that receives millions of pounds in funding from the UK Government and the European Union amongst others, International Medical Corps is under increasing pressure and scrutiny to demonstrate that we are worthy custodians of tax payers' money and will utilize aid funding as efficiently and effectively as possible. This is a major challenge for all not-for-profit agencies who must find the right balance between focusing energies and resources on delivering life saving assistance and alleviating the suffering of vulnerable people impacted by conflict and natural disasters, while at the same time putting in place policies, systems and procedures that ensure we are accountable to our donors and can demonstrate that what we said we would achieve in our proposals for funding actually comes to fruition in the real world.

There can sometimes be a misconception amongst the general public that the humanitarian aid sector is not very accountable for the funds received from major donors. The occasional stories that are highlighted in the media of corruption or misuse of aid funding can serve to support that view. However, the great majority of credible humanitarian organisations are devoting an ever-increasing amount of time and resources to ensure that as a sector we are increasingly transparent and accountable for the resources we are entrusted with and for the results and impact of the programmes that we deliver.

As part of our commitment to strengthening our transparency and accountability to donors International Medical Corps became a full member of the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) in March 2011. HAP is a multi-agency initiative working to improve the accountability of humanitarian action to people affected by disasters and other crises.

One of the commitments we make as a member of HAP is to produce a publicly available accountability framework. The accountability framework provides an overview of the work that we do and makes a clear declaration of interest regarding the funding we receive, the partners we have, the memberships and associations we are signatories to and the countries in which we work. The framework also outlines the main policies, international standards and guidelines against which we measure our performance and it states our commitment to further strengthen relationships with our stakeholders.

We have a responsibility to ensure that we are accountable and give value for money both to our donors and to the people we target with our work. Value for money in emergency contexts can be difficult to measure where speed of response is so important and the cheapest option may not be the best option to save lives. A better measure of value for money is perhaps looking at the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of our programmes and we are required to put ever more focus on measuring and recording our efforts in this regard to demonstrate value for money to our donors.

We manage our funds in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles and comply with both local and international legal requirements. In addition, all of our staff, consultants and volunteers commit to a rigorous code of conduct that covers their professional and personal behaviour when working in one of our thirty countries of operation worldwide.

We have an internal audit department dedicated to ensuring that our funds are utilised as intended by our donors and we put considerable time and investment into ensuring we meet the

'All of these accountability initiatives require a great deal of time and resources to implement and the challenge for the NGO community is to keep pace with the ever-increasing demands from donors'

highest standards in this regard. One example of this is our Ethics Point initiative which provides a publicly available toll free phone number and email address where concerned individuals can report anonymously any suspected cases of breaches of our code of conduct by our staff to an independent third party who will receive their complaint, document it and ensure International Medical Corps is made aware of it in order to take appropriate remedial action.

We also have specialist staff to monitor and evaluate our programmes and ensure that 1) we are meeting or exceeding agreed international standards on the delivery of aid in terms of quality and impact and 2) that programmes are designed, monitored and implemented in line with local needs and 3) in consultation with the host country authorities, communities and beneficiaries that we serve. Moreover, we contract external independent evaluations of our programmes where funding permits and invite and encourage monitoring visits from humanitarian experts from the donor community who critique our work and help us learn from experience as part of our commitment to continuously striving to improve.

Our funding from institutional donors such as the United Kingdom Department for International Development and the European Union are based on agreed contractual arrangements, and almost all major donors have guidelines on financial and administrative rules. In order to properly account for these funds, donors generally require both financial and narrative reports during programme implementation and at the end of the grant period and we are fully compliant with these requirements. Our financial systems and controls are regularly audited by internal and external auditors. They also verify expenditure and assess our organisational capacity in finance and programme management.

Many of the major institutional donors now pre-qualify organisations for emergency funding through an intensive and rigorous review of our financial and programmatic policies, systems and procedures and an investigation of the quality of our work in previous emergency responses. This way, funding can be dispersed quickly and with confidence to agencies that have demonstrated they are worthy of being entrusted with public funds. ECHO's Framework Partnership Agreement and DFID's Rapid Response Fund are good examples of this prequalification approach to funding.

All of these accountability initiatives require a great deal of time and resources to implement and the challenge for the NGO community is to keep pace with the ever-increasing demands from donors for greater transparency and accountability and monitoring and evaluation of our work. Attracting funding and resources to ensure we can always satisfy donor expectations in terms of the wider accountability dimensions demanded of us can be very challenging and we continue, along with our NGO counterparts in the sector, to look for ways and means to do this.

We believe that by putting accountability initiatives at the heart of what we do, into our culture, our policies and procedures, that we can deliver humanitarian programmes that are increasingly efficient, effective and economical and that we can confidently hold ourselves open to the external scrutiny of our donors and meet their expectations. In so doing, we will continue to advocate for recognition that these efforts require increased dedicated resources from major donors that are not yet consistently and predictably available.

Moreover, accountability works both ways in a partnership arrangement and the main institutional donors must also be willing to be increasingly accountable to their implementing partners on how they target and direct their funding support. Both donors and recipients of donor funding need to continue to work together to find the right balance on these challenging issues so that the humanitarian sector continues to improve the quality and transparency of its work for the many millions of vulnerable and impoverished people that need and deserve our support.

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ACCOUNTABILITY IN HUMANITARIAN AID: GERMANY'S VIEW AS AN INTERNATIONAL DONOR

THE ISSUE- WHAT IS ACCOUNTABILITY IN HUMANITARIAN AID?

'Germany considers both individual and collective international mechanisms for evaluating the performance of humanitarian aid provided by international donors to be important instruments.'

Natural disasters, crises and conflicts are still increasing worldwide each year, resulting in an urgent need for humanitarian aid. Therefore, humanitarian aid remains a priority topic on the Federal Republic of Germany's agenda as an international donor.

However, delivering this aid is only one side of the coin. Evaluating the effectiveness, relevance and appropriateness of humanitarian measures during or after their implementation is vital in determining the accountability of humanitarian aid vis-à-vis the beneficiaries and also - from a donor's point of view - vis-à-vis taxpayers and the general public. Indeed, all parts of the humanitarian system need to be accountable, including donors.

Germany considers both individual and collective international mechanisms for evaluating the performance of humanitarian aid provided by international donors to be important instruments. Therefore, Germany aims to cooperate with Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) countries as well as OECD-DAC countries and non-traditional donors to further develop the existing indicators for measuring the accountability of humanitarian aid. Within the international donor community, Germany has a great interest in and is committed to various approaches to accountability in humanitarian aid of which two are presented in this article.

In 2011/12 Germany co-chaired the **Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative**. The GHD initiative is an informal donor forum which facilitates collective advancement of GHD principles[i] and good practice. It recognises that by working together donors can more effectively encourage and stimulate principled funding behaviour and, by extension, improved humanitarian action. However, the existing GHD indicators for donors' humanitarian performance still represent an insufficient accountability system. Therefore, during its time as co-chair Germany together with other GHD members initiated an extensive review process of the GHD indicators. This process aims to assess GHD donors' individual and collective success and makes it possible for GHD donors to reflect internally on their humanitarian strategies and practices in relation to the GHD principles. Furthermore, it will provide the GHD community with valuable information about the interdependence between members' individual and collective decisions and responses in the sphere of humanitarian donorship. The project focuses on three main objectives: 1) the development of a new analytical framework which allows for self-assessment and differentiates areas of individual vs. collective performance; 2) a focus on qualitative analytical criteria and the avoidance of duplication with existing financial tracking mechanisms, as well as 3) the design of a new pilot monitoring process which will subsequently be further developed in detail.

The second example of Germany's perspective on accountability in humanitarian aid is the first inter-ministerial, independent and comprehensive analysis and assessment of Germany's humanitarian assistance abroad, which was completed in 2012[ii]. The study found that Germany is undertaking multi-faceted, successful and exemplary activities in humanitarian crises and transitional scenarios. Recommendations contained in the study acknowledge the importance of further advancing the reform of the humanitarian system, highlighting in particular the challenges related to leadership, coordination and accountability. In improving effectiveness of German humanitarian assistance, the study encourages strengthening of local capacities. Key recommendations also focus on ways to better link relief, rehabilitation and development. Building on the study, Germany is also committed to strengthening the humanitarian system through enhancing preparedness.

In the future, it is crucial that greater emphasis be placed on evaluating German humanitarian aid and to remain alert and active in the field of humanitarian accountability, also on an international basis.

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[i] *In 2003, 23 principles were agreed upon to enhance the coherence and effectiveness of donor action, as well as their accountability to beneficiaries, implementing organisations and domestic constituencies, with regard to the funding, co-ordination, follow-up and evaluation of such actions.*

[ii] *Channel Research (2011) 'German humanitarian aid abroad', Joint evaluation.*

THE ROLE OF HR ACCOUNTABILITY AND DUTY OF CARE IN AID ORGANISATIONS

THE ISSUE- WHAT IS ACCOUNTABILITY IN HUMANITARIAN AID?

'Duty of care is central to effective and comprehensive HR management'

Aid organisations operating in increasingly volatile and insecure environments today must respond internally as well as externally to a high level of accountability and duty of care with regards to Human Resources (HR) management. According to the different stages of organisational development, this potentially requires a paradigm shift from a less consolidated approach of these principles to a fully operational risk management system which identifies, monitors, and supports critical elements of staff safety, wellbeing, and professional development.

Such a fundamental change, which is not simply operational but by and large cultural, is normally driven by a combination of internal and external forces. Typically organisations will see internally - through informal channels of communication or through institutionalised feedback mechanisms (e.g. anonymous 360° feedback or staff surveys) - an increasing demand for transparent HR communication, safeguards for work/life balance, established HR policies, and fair and consistent HR Management (HRM). These elements represent strong indicators in the process towards better accountability.

The intensity of the demand from staff will provide management with an indication of the level of change readiness (or propensity to change) within the organisation; in other words, the willingness to accept a reform process at a given stage of the organisational development or institutional history.

External forces alerting organisations to the need for an increased level of accountability on the part of the management usually come from new regulations and best practices relating to international organisations. International forums and communities of practice generate awareness about the need for a change in HRM approach, moving away from models that are either compliance-based or purely emergency operation-driven towards models which are more results-oriented (managerial) and integrity-based (motivational).

The combination of these factors creates the cultural and normative space for reforms that aim to guarantee staff the best efforts and attention of their organisation. Duty of care implies that organisations have an obligation to adopt a risk management approach that will warrant, to the best of the resources available, the safety and security of staff, especially staff employed in locations where security implications are high. This is particularly important for humanitarian NGOs which often work in conflict situations. Such duty of care can be developed only within a clear framework of identified risks and related individual accountability in all organisational roles for each particular process involving staff management.

Accountability-based management includes HR policies and practices which need to: 1) have a clear identification of responsibilities in each process, 2) be communicated transparently, interpreted fairly, and applied consistently by HR specialists and line managers and 3) must be fully understood and complied with by the staff. In this way, duty of care becomes central to effective and comprehensive HR management. INTERSOS has adopted a comprehensive approach to risk management implementing a broad set of procedures, plans, and tools, in particular with regards to staff security in the field. These are regularly updated and monitored by management and staff at various levels. Tools such as securing key information about staff in preparation for the unfortunate event of incidents/abductions or providing staff with a "Constant Companion" (smart but comprehensive list of recommendations to adopt in case of emergency incidents) complement comprehensive mission risk assessment plans.

It is particularly important in humanitarian and emergency contexts that HR accountability towards staff strikes an appropriate balance not only between the economic and physical dimensions of HRM but also the psychological one. The mix of provisions and policies which needs to be implemented to support staff working in unsafe and unstable environments is typically far-reaching and more interconnected than in other sectors. Comprehensive integrated HR management approaches can facilitate planning and delivery of all HR components (safety and care, welfare, staffing and retention, career development, training, performance evaluation, compensation and benefits, knowledge sharing, etc.) whilst ensuring accountability and risk management. Today these elements are indicators of a professional humanitarian NGO.

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[i] *In 2003, 23 principles were agreed upon to enhance the coherence and effectiveness of donor action, as well as their accountability to beneficiaries, implementing organisations and domestic constituencies, with regard to the funding, co-ordination, follow-up and evaluation of such actions.*

[ii] *Channel Research (2011) 'German humanitarian aid abroad', Joint evaluation.*

WE NEED TO TALK: WHY INFORMING THE PUBLIC ABOUT OUR WORK IS IMPORTANT AND HOW WE DO THIS

THE ISSUE- WHAT IS ACCOUNTABILITY IN HUMANITARIAN AID?

'If we really intend to inform a broader public in an appropriate and easily accessible way, we need to give clear explanations for complex situations.'

Accountability in humanitarian aid is a key word that is often and widely used. We mostly hear about it in the context of project reporting and evaluation or in connection with donor or partner relationships. As a non-profit organisation with more than one million members, Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund e.V. (Worker's Samaritan Organisation - ASB) is profoundly convinced that accountability is also a basic requirement for our relationship towards the public. The public in general and our members, donors, staff members and volunteers in particular are the ones who enable our work and commitment. Therefore it follows that we hold ourselves accountable towards them. In our opinion, this kind of accountability includes four different aspects: information, transparency, networking and confidence.

From the point of view of accountability, **information** means much more to us than only publishing in a bullet- points what we are doing, where, and for whom. If we think of rendering a truthful account of our projects - regardless of whether they are on a local, regional, national or international level - we aim to give appropriate insights not only into their implementation but also into the underlying strategy and the people involved, whether those are staff members, volunteers or beneficiaries.

Often project reporting is in danger of being technical or functional gobbledygook - or written in a terminology that is meaningless for those who are not experts in humanitarian aid. If we really intend to inform a broader public in an appropriate and easily accessible way, we need to give clear explanations for complex situations. We must learn to see our work with the eyes of our audiences and firstly answer the questions people may ask about our work. This also means that we have to identify our (different) target audiences and to edit the content in a correspondingly appropriate way.

Transparency is not only relevant to institutional donors or official partners of a non-profit organisation, but also to the public in general. Transparency is more than information on financial or hierarchical structures. It is more than some photos or spread sheets published in a leaflet. Transparency as an integrated approach is the base of any networking, of credibility and confidence - pillars which ASB as a renowned non-profit organisation relies on. For this reason, ASB has installed executive boards as well as internal audit units on local, regional and national levels. We also undergo stringent quality controls and evaluation by national and international authorities.

ASB attaches special importance to **networking**, not only in the implementation of our projects but also when it comes to accountability. Networking structures can assist and support our attempts to reach out to the public and to disclose information on our everyday work, our current and planned missions and our lobbying positions. For instance, ASB is a member not only of the VOICE network, but also of alliances such as Aktion Deutschland Hilft (Germany's Relief Coalition) and VENRO (the umbrella organisation of 120 NGOs in Germany). We also take active part in Samaritan International, the network of international Samaritan organisations and initiatives.

Finally, we are convinced that **confidence** has to play an important role in accountability. We need to give our audiences sufficient and reliable information and be ready to open up for a sincere dialogue to lay the ground for credibility and trust.

To fulfil these requirements, ASB tries to find a captivating mixture of information and emotion. Talking about accountability, it may surprise readers that we also consider emotion. But our experience is that pure facts often do not succeed in winning the public's interest and thus tend to close rather than open the door for accountability. We therefore focus on reports and descriptive texts as well as photos from the field, portraits of the assistance we give and human interest stories. It is very important to us that not only official representatives (such as the federal manager or the spokesperson) should have a chance to express his/her opinion, but also beneficiaries, relatives and other people involved.

To reach the different target groups, ASB communicates through different "channels": Print (with an annual report, flyers, brochures and the ASB Magazine sent out to all members); online (e.g. website, newsletter, social media activities); events (where visitors can not only get information but also meet our staff and become acquainted with our mission and vision); as well as trust-based media relations. Through all these channels, we explain the respective projects' social or political background, their aims, target groups and budgets (e.g. in the Annual Report ASB-Foreign Aid). We point out our mission and strategy and - by portraits, interviews and other features - introduce the public to the living conditions in the project regions.

'Forthrightness and honesty are what the audience deserves, expects and honours - more than just celebrations of success.'

As ASB is working to enable beneficiaries to lead a life with dignity, we also emphasise this dignity in our communication. We do not want to expose people in need as hopeless objects but as human beings deserving respect, support and personal attention. Adhering to the Red Cross Code of Conduct, we also emphasise the necessity not only to respect culture and customs of the people in need but also to understand them as an important part of our target audience of accountability measures.

Whenever possible, we give account not only of our successes but also of the difficulties met during implementation. One could think this may be risky and alienate interested audiences- private or institutional donors. But we are convinced that forthrightness and honesty are what the audience deserves, expects and honours - more than just celebrations of success. Pointing out obstacles also transmits a deeper understanding of our work and illustrates why ASB's engagement is needed and worth supporting.

Last but not least, we also integrate our staff members - full time staff, honorary board members or volunteers - in our accountability concept. As part of the public, they also rely on our credible, transparent, precise, correct and consistent communication. But even more as ambassadors of our work they can bear direct witness to ASB's mission "We help here and now" and the way it is accomplished.

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Ensuring an efficient communication of EU's humanitarian aid actions

The FPA[i] provisions currently define communication as follows: "*bring the support given by the European Union to the attention of the general public, the media or the beneficiaries of the Action*"[ii]. This definition encompasses both actions based on visibility in the field (downstream) and institutional communication for the wider EU public (upstream). Ensuring both has proven to be challenging for all humanitarian actors, and the acknowledgement is that the impact of these multiple and scattered communication actions is not effective in raising the awareness of the general public on the EU's humanitarian aid actions.

There is a general feeling is that humanitarian organisations cannot realistically fulfil the objective of ensuring that EU Humanitarian Aid is visible and recognised by the EU's tax payers. Humanitarian organisations are by their very nature focused on delivering quality emergency assistance. In this mind-set, resources and expertise necessary to ensure visibility and communication are scarce, and as a priority concentrated on the organisations' own visibility in order to maintain a sufficient level of financial and strategic independence from donors and to fulfil co-financing requirements. Donors' publicity is therefore often restricted to fragmented, action-based, downstream visibility. In a variety of countries with conflict zones where we intervene, this minimal visibility (namely stickers, hats, t-shirts or press releases) is even not possible in order to ensure the security of our teams and requires a formal waiver from ECHO.

Paradoxically, the recent draft concept paper around the future 2014 FPA gives an even more prominent role to visibility and communication, and reinforces the partners' obligations in this matter by proposing for example that all partners establish communication contact points in the field or by suggesting penalties for partners in case of repetitive failure to ensure the visibility of the action.

In order to avoid a situation where NGOs would struggle even harder to comply with these requirements and to contribute to the necessary accountability for humanitarian funds, DG ECHO should take a more proactive approach towards visibility and communication strategies by:

1) Restricting FPA visibility requirements to their minimum in order to match the average partners' capacity

2) Enlarging the role of Regional Information Officers that could ensure direct communication and visibility activities, particularly during emergency phases

and 3) Implementing directly or sub-contracting to professional agencies its own visibility and communication awareness raising campaigns and actions, rather than entrusting them to its partners that for all the reasons described above have a limited capacity and strategic interest to do this.

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[i] *The Framework Partnership Agreement governs relationships between DG ECHO and its partners*
[ii] *Article 4.1 of the General Conditions*

RESILIENCE: WILL IT CHANGE HOW THE EU WORKS?

VIEW ON THE EU

'For the EU, the shift towards resilience is pushed by dramatically increasing needs while the means of assistance (aid budgets) are decreasing.'

The practice of doing "business as usual", where a gap between humanitarian aid and development is present, has proven to be ineffective. Increasingly, the international development community acknowledges the need to change their policies and implementation. Calls for better coordinated approaches have raised an interest in "resilience", including in the EU.

RECURRING CRISIS, RENEWED DEBATES

In 2010 the world was called upon again to respond to the famine in the Horn of Africa, and in 2012 to the Sahel crisis. However, the latter was not classified as yet another food crisis caused by drought. Instead it escalated the resilience[i] debate among donors and NGO communities. As highlighted in the joint Save the Children and World Vision report *"Ending the Everyday Emergency: Resilience and Children in the Sahel"*[ii]: "The overarching driver of this crisis is neither drought, nor food deficit. The most vulnerable families are in crisis because they have no protection against shocks like grain prices doubling. This is the *'resilience deficit'*."

The Sahel crisis reinforced the awareness that vulnerability and fragility are common on-going factors, resulting from worsening inter-related challenges such as climate change and demographic growth. EU Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, Kristalina Georgieva, stated in 2011 that *"it is clear that our world has changed. But our mindset has not."*

One year later we find the EU at the forefront of what is now widely called "building resilience" with initiatives such as SHARE[iii] and AGIR-Sahel[iv], gaining momentum and support from Member States and NGOs for this change in mind-set and practice.

BUILDING RESILIENCE FOR THE EU

For the EU, the shift towards resilience is pushed by dramatically increasing needs while the means of assistance (aid budgets) are decreasing. Moreover, there is a realization that the methods of assistance are not mitigating the effects of the crisis in the long term. Consequently, the EU called for "smarter and more agile…aid policies and to deliver better value for money."[v] In practice this would imply becoming better at integrating elements such as Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) (with early warning and preparedness) and Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD) into a broader framework that looks at how the crisis response fits within an overall multi-sector development country response.

The EU's SHARE initiative was welcomed by NGOs, but perceived as a pilot humanitarian-development approach, ambitious in purpose, but rather vague in terms of concrete implementation. Nevertheless, Commissioner Georgieva continued to drive for "doing business differently", gradually gaining support from others. Consequently, the Brussels High Level Meeting in June 2012 aimed at building a partnership for resilience to the food crisis in the Sahel, building political consensus by joining local governments, the United Nations, African Union, Le Comité permanent Inter-Etats de lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel and EU Member States. It also built momentum for practical approaches, such as the creation of a technical group; drafting a roadmap; and increasing funding and consultation with Civil Society Organisations. Moreover, it endorsed coherence by embedding AGIR-Sahel into a broader conversation around resilience initiatives such as the Global Alliance for Action for Drought Resilience and Growth and the Political Champions for Disaster Resilience.

Shortly, the EC will launch a Joint Communication on Resilience from DEVCO and ECHO, meant to link a large amount of related issues and challenges. This Communication is another indicator of the political momentum that resilience has gained over the past months. Given the light consultation process and compressed timeframe for developing this Communication, there are concerns that it might merely reformulate the status quo, rather than elaborating the new ways and changes needed in order to bridge the operational gap in working for resilience.

We hope this will be another step to ensure political will and strong implementation and respond to the complex requirements of resilience that must be addressed for impact:

- Ensuring flexible and predictable funding.
- Ensuring that LRRD and DRR are included in all programming.
- Ensuring DRR starts long before crises hit, and involves all sectors of society, including the most vulnerable and children and youth.
- Ensuring mechanisms for close coordination among donors and NGOs alike, together with providing support for national governments to enhance their capacity.
- Ensuring Policy Coherence for Development and solutions to underlying causes, for example by placing nutrition, social protection, and small-scale farmers at the forefront of long-term interventions.

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[i] *Resilience is generally defined as the overall capacity of a community to resist, recover from, or adapt to shocks.*

[ii] *The full report can be found at: www.wvi.org/wvi/wviweb.nsf/8ACB216444EC63D3882579680069B44D/$file/Ending-the-Everyday-Emergency-report.pdf*

[iii] *SHARE- 'Supporting the Horn of Africa's Resilience' - seeks to improve food security and disaster preparedness in the Horn of Africa.*

[iv] *AGIR - Alliance Globale pour l'Initiative Résilience - Sahel is a partnership with as core aim: to make sure that the people in the Sahel can better cope with future drought.*

[v] *Kristalina Georgieva, "Coping together with an increasingly fragile world", 4th Stakeholders Meeting of Belgian Development Cooperation, Brussels, 4 May 2011.*

HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS IN MALI: CAREFUL PLANNING NEEDED

FIELD FOCUS

'We need to analyse very carefully every action, the neutrality and impartiality of different local stakeholders we might engage with, and consider the 'Do no Harm' principle'

The Sahel food crisis combined with the conflict which recently broke out in Mali has left a country that was well on the road to development in a situation with a political vacuum in the north, a troubled south, and a considerable outflow of refugees into neighbouring countries. Since the beginning of this year, the various and disperse rebels, from separatist to criminal and terrorist-linked groups, have seriously limited the access of foreign aid workers and NGOs to populations in the north, interrupting on-going programmes. Aid agencies are warning that the situation might deteriorate even further and even though the rain has improved the outlook for the harvest, a locust threat and increasing food prices might continue to negatively affect the coping mechanisms of the population.

As most aid agencies were pursuing long-term development strategies, there was low capacity to respond to the primary needs arising from this crisis, which has delayed the humanitarian response needed. Moreover, due to the variety of needs, mitigation schemes in response to the food security crisis (for example agricultural and food security programmes) and emergency responses were mixed up.

NGOs who were already in the country, as well as a few new organisations, have been considering various implementation options to provide an effective response, but this is hampered by a lack of available information and data- especially on north-Mali- as well as serious security risks resulting from the unstable situation.

An effective response also depends on whether aid agencies adhere to accountability principles, and in particular the humanitarian principles[i]. These humanitarian principles need to be clear for the staff of aid agencies but also for local partner NGOs, as most agencies can only work in northern Mali through a partnership approach or via remote control; access is not given to non-muslim international staff.

To facilitate access, a security strategy often taken in these situations is prioritizing "acceptance": adhering to the humanitarian principles in order to win the acceptance of local populations, parties to the conflict and other stakeholders, and thereby secure access to vulnerable populations at risk. However, in the case of Mali, additional protection measures are necessary to ensure the security of staff as well as beneficiaries and other stakeholders.

In the case of Action Contre la Faim, management processes are designed and monitored to ensure transparency and accountability towards stakeholders including partners and beneficiaries. Committed to codes of good practices and charters, we have developed strategies to cooperate and coordinate with other actors at the local level to increase the effectiveness of the overall response. For example, we support international coordination mechanisms, which means we regularly exchange with different stakeholders, allowing us to review priorities and approaches if needed.

However, in a context such as Mali, these approaches have their limitations as we need to analyse very carefully every action, the neutrality and impartiality of different local stakeholders we might engage with, and consider the 'Do no Harm' principle[ii]. If aid agencies intervene too quickly (also because of external pressure), some of these principles and considerations could be ignored and as a result bring agency staff, partners and beneficiaries at risk. Badly planned actions of one agency can jeopardise the reputation and perception of the entire humanitarian sector, decreasing access to the population. There is a need for effective coordination mechanisms, which are based on the humanitarian principles and which promote joint, coordinated and sound 'modus operandi'. Moreover, such coordination mechanisms need to give a more realistic picture of the situation and possible interventions, while allowing flexible approaches. This is necessary because our *primary* accountability is towards the affected population.

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[i] *Humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence*

[ii] *This principle requires humanitarian organisations to strive to 'minimize the harm they may inadvertently be doing by being present and providing assistance. Humanitarian actors need to be aware if aid is used as an instrument of war or if aid is an indirect part of the dynamics of the conflict' (Humanitarian Exchange Magazine 43).*

VOICE AT WORK

VOICE elects a new President at its General Assembly and prepares for the future- In May 2012 Nicolas Borsinger was elected for a three year-term. After working for 14 years for the ICRC, both in the field and at headquarters, Mr. Borsinger became the Director of the Foundation "Pro Victimis" in March 2000. Under his leadership, the network will embark on a new Strategic Plan in 2013.

The General Assembly decided that one of the priorities for the years ahead will be to promote the added value of humanitarian NGOs, as NGOs are the main deliverers of humanitarian aid. As a start, the 2012 VOICE Resolution highlights issues such as NGO expertise, the close partnership of NGOs with national and local civil society, the flexibility of NGOs and what needs-based humanitarian aid means[i].

This issue was also picked up at a high-level VOICE event in May during which speakers reflected on NGOs' contributions to the humanitarian sector in the past and future[ii]. The event was organised on the occasion of VOICE 20th birthday: "My birthday wish is that you would maintain and further strengthen your role as an NGO focal point for all humanitarian work done in Europe because we need a place where all these interests come together." *(Claus Sørensen, ECHO Director-General)* "Many thanks for very efficient NGO networking and lobbying in the last 20 years. It has been a pleasure for us to be a member. Keep up the spirit!" *(VOICE member)*

VOICE and CONCORD launch position paper on Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD)- In preparation of the European Parliament's Hearing on the topic, the two NGO networks launched a common position on *'Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development: Towards a more joined up approach enhancing resilience and impact[iii]'*. This timely position paper was widely picked up by decision makers in the EU and UN, and makes these key points:

- Ensure sustained political commitment for LRRD, developing an Action Plan which includes clear definitions and makes EU LRRD efforts transparent and progress measurable
- Ensure that LRRD, disaster risk reduction and risk management are integrated in development programming in disaster prone countries and protracted crises, and that the programmes are developed in consultation with civil society
- Establish concrete linkages between humanitarian aid and development cooperation programmes to ensure LRRD while preserving their specific comparative advantages, ensuring efficient use of funding with highest possible impact
- Improve donor coordination between humanitarian and development actors at all levels
- Ensure adequate funding for LRRD and funding mechanisms that are timely, predictable and flexible, using the different financial instruments available in a balanced way

VOICE members speak at high-level international conference on Sahel- On June 18, EU Commissioners Piebalgs and Georgieva launched AGIR Sahel (Alliance Globale pour l'Initiative Résilience). VOICE and CONCORD members welcomed the EU leadership and stressed that in order to ensure improved resilience for affected populations, strengthened dialogue between donors, affected states and Civil Society Organisations during aid programming is crucial. Moreover, NGOs reiterated the importance of both responding to the emergency and using development programmes to build up local capacity to handle crises. Disaster Risk Reduction and LRRD are therefore key building blocks to achieve the goal of improved resilience. Lastly, members pointed out the necessity for the EC to build on and support existing initiatives, including plans of the governments in the region.

Advocating with the European Parliament for principled humanitarian aid- The EU strives to constantly improve its crisis management tools. Climate Change Adaptation and the role of various actors are important issues in this process. For example, the EP recently drafted a report on the use of military assets in climate-driven crises and natural disasters. VOICE successfully advocated for respect of the humanitarian principles as set out in the Lisbon Treaty and the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, as well as for a reference to the international Oslo and MCDA[iv] guidelines, which provide a clear framework for the use of military and civil defence assets in natural disasters and complex emergencies. From a humanitarian perspective, military forces and humanitarian actors each have different goals, strategies, approaches, mandates and accountability frameworks in conflict situations. Often humanitarian agencies that are perceived as/or acting according to agendas other than their humanitarian mandate may lose their credibility in the eyes of other local actors as well as the trust of the population they are there to serve. This can severely affect their ability to operate and, ultimately, create security risks for their staff and for the aforementioned populations.

[i] 2012 VOICE Resolution *'What humanitarian NGOs are all about'*

[ii] Event report *available on VOICE website*

[iii] Position paper *available on VOICE website*

[iv] *Military and Civil Defence Assets*

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