

VOICE out loud

19

VOICE NEWSLETTER

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2014 is a year of institutional change in the European Union, with new members of the European Parliament and Commission. With that in mind, this issue of our newsletter takes a look at the state of the EU's current humanitarian aid policies and challenges from different angles. The priorities of the network in relation to the EU in 2014 are encapsulated in the **VOICE policy resolution** adopted at our General Assembly in May and included in this edition of our newsletter.

Kicking off this issue of VOICE Out Loud, we examine the **evolution of EU humanitarian aid** from its early beginnings up to today, when the EU is a major international humanitarian donor. Beyond the assistance to some 120 million people per year, another of the EU's main achievements in this field dates back to 2007 when the European Commission, the EU Member States and the European Parliament agreed a '**European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid**'. CARE Deutschland - Luxemburg stresses the importance of this policy framework in complex conflicts and crises on the ground while the VOICE secretariat presents a study on NGOs' perceptions of the impact and continued relevance of the European Consensus seven years after its adoption.

As well as ECHO being the world's second largest single donor, Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe looks at its role beyond funding, particularly in defending humanitarian principles in the field. Continuing with an operational perspective, ICCO looks at the importance of NGOs' role in **reducing disaster risk and building resilience** and Plan UK highlights the importance of addressing **gender in humanitarian programming**.

This year, ECHO has faced a **shortfall in funding** which already has an impact on projects in a range of crisis situations. Save the Children gives us their view on how this affects their organization and what actions are needed to resolve the matter.

In the 'View on the EU' section we are happy to have **interviewed the International Committee of the Red Cross**'s EU representative, Mr. François Bellon. He reflects on some of the key challenges faced by humanitarians all over the world and shares his thoughts on the EU contribution to assisting people in need.

The 'field focus' written by Medair looks at the situation in **South Sudan** where humanitarian actors face difficulties in reaching the most vulnerable. From the ground, they report that many humanitarian needs are still unmet and there are serious concerns about the risk of famine.

VOICE

VOICE stands for 'Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies'. VOICE is a network of 82 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in humanitarian aid worldwide. VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor on EU humanitarian affairs and disaster risk reduction and it promotes the values of humanitarian NGOs.

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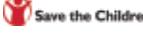
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VOICE out loud

ISSUE 19, JULY 2014

THE ADDED VALUE OF HUMANITARIAN NGOS



NGOs together with the UN and the Red Cross movement are the main deliverers of humanitarian aid in the field. The ever-increasing number of refugees and crisis-affected people are stretching the global humanitarian system to its limits. As this newsletter seeks to give an overview of EU humanitarian aid today, it is worth stressing the important role and added value of NGOs in this endeavour.

NGOs provide principled aid - Humanitarian aid is provided based on the fundamental humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. This means that human suffering should be addressed wherever it is found, solely on the basis of need, without discrimination between or within affected populations. Moreover, aid needs to be provided without favouring any side in an armed conflict and with no other (political, economic or military) objectives in mind. These principles are set out in the Red Cross Code of Conduct¹ which most professional NGOs adhere to. Abiding by these principles enables NGOs to provide support in sensitive operating environments, including in conflict situations.

NGOs are able to deliver humanitarian aid where it is most needed - No two humanitarian crises are alike. In an emergency, for example after an earthquake, humanitarian aid needs to reach the affected people quickly while at the same time being tailored to the specific needs on the ground. As NGOs are often already present, they know the local context. Furthermore, they work on the basis of professional needs assessments to reach the most vulnerable populations, which often brings them to situations far beyond the attention of the media. As a result, NGOs often work where few others will go.

NGOs have a wealth of specialised expertise - The great number and diversity of humanitarian crises worldwide requires a substantial amount of expertise, for example to ensure clean water and hygiene, to defuse mines, or to protect children. To be able to answer to the differing needs of affected populations, a diversity of professional humanitarian NGOs is needed. In sudden onset crises, speed is crucial. Humanitarian NGOs have a commitment to act quickly to reduce suffering, and their operational and logistical structures are designed for rapid response. Often NGOs have worked in a given country prior to the emergency, which can facilitate rapid needs assessment and access to people in crisis.

NGOs work in close partnership with national and local civil society - NGOs by definition are rooted in civil society. They are supported by the citizens in their own countries, are founded on volunteerism, and often receive private financial contributions. Therefore, humanitarian NGOs such as VOICE members can act as an expression of European solidarity towards populations in crisis.

One of the main comparative advantages of humanitarian NGOs is their close work with communities and local actors. By developing partnerships in the management of humanitarian assistance, the disaster response can be based on local capacities and the most vulnerable people reached. National NGOs are often in the front-line of emergencies. Close cooperation with national and local civil society is also important for accountability. The concerns of crisis-affected populations are not always high on the political agenda. Through national and international NGOs, their voice is brought to decision makers.

NGOs are well equipped to build resilience of crisis-affected populations - Working with local communities gives NGOs an opportunity to look beyond the immediate relief phase by supporting the capacity of affected populations to be better prepared and to prevent future disasters - to be more resilient in the face of an emergency. Similarly NGOs are well equipped to promote LRRD (Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development). This means they can bridge the gap from short-term lifesaving humanitarian assistance to more long-term sustainable development of societies due to their knowledge of local contexts and established links with local people, organisations and authorities.

NGOs seek to constantly improve the quality of their work - A natural concern for effectiveness of needs-based humanitarian aid arising from close contact with affected populations has been one of the drivers for the humanitarian community's longstanding engagement with quality and accountability initiatives, starting from a major evaluation of the Rwanda crisis in 1994. Examples are the Sphere Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response², the Humanitarian Accountability Project³ or the People in Aid Code⁴ for the management of aid personnel. At EU level, the Framework Partnership Agreement of the European Commission indicates a recognised capacity to carry out effective needs-based humanitarian assistance.

NGOs are cost-effective - Overall, humanitarian NGOs are considered to be efficient and cost-effective. A major reason why OECD-DAC donors work with NGOs is their capacity to deliver on objectives. The key to effectiveness lies in an open relationship and dialogue between NGOs and the local community that ensures relevant projects and efficient means to achieve them. Often backed by volunteers and individual supporters, NGOs work on a non-profit basis. A non-bureaucratic approach enables low transaction costs and flexibility to adapt to changing environments.

1. <http://www.ifrc.org/en/publications-and-reports/code-of-conduct/>
2. <http://www.sphereproject.org/>
3. <http://www.hapinternational.org/>
4. <http://www.peopleinaid.org/>

Kathrin Schick
Director
VOICE

EU HUMANITARIAN AID: AN INCREASINGLY COMPLEX ISSUE - BASED ON SIMPLE PRINCIPLES

THE ISSUE - A CLOSER LOOK AT EU HUMANITARIAN AID

'There is no such thing as an uncomplicated humanitarian crisis.'

★ Humanitarian Aid as carried out via ECHO and Member States is a cornerstone of the global humanitarian endeavor. The evolution of EU humanitarian aid has been part of the overall growth of the sector over recent decades. There is, however, a risk that public perception of what humanitarian aid entails has not kept up with the rapid development of what is in practice a complex and challenging area of activity; which involves a diversity of actors, systems, policy frameworks and is subject to many ongoing debates.

So what is EU humanitarian aid in 2014... And how did we get here?

★ RECENT EVOLUTION OF EUROPEAN UNION HUMANITARIAN AID

With a long tradition of European humanitarianism to build on (see box), the European Commission established a dedicated office for humanitarian aid (now DG ECHO) in 1992, in what was then a European Union of 12 Member States. One of the first challenges for the newly formed humanitarian office was Somalia, where more than half the population was in need of assistance. At the same time, ECHO's work in the Former Yugoslavia constituted the single largest humanitarian aid undertaking ever carried out by an international organisation in one country.¹ EU humanitarian decision making was given a standardized framework in 1993 with the first 'Partnership Framework Agreement'. Subsequent revisions (of what is now known as the FPA) have developed ECHO's close relationship with NGOs as key humanitarian actors.

In 1996 Council Regulation 1257/96 laid out the objectives of EU humanitarian aid, and established the procedures for its implementation. This regulation, which includes core humanitarian principles, still frames the EU approach. In 2007, the

regulation was complemented by the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. Signed by Commission, European Parliament and Member States, the Consensus provides a common EU declaration of vision, principles and practice for humanitarian aid. As a result of the Consensus, the Council Working Group on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA) was established, and has developed into a significant body for discussing and coordinating EU humanitarian affairs.

EU humanitarian aid was given a legal basis in the Lisbon Treaty, entering into force in 2009. Article 214 on humanitarian aid once more enshrines key humanitarian principles including impartiality and neutrality, as well as underlining the complementary nature of EU and Member State actions. Previously overseen by the Commissioner for development, in 2010 humanitarian aid became part of a new Commissioner portfolio along with international cooperation and crisis response. This coincided with civil protection being brought under the same roof as humanitarian aid in DG ECHO for a more coordinated EU response to crises in Europe and abroad.

★ HUMANITARIAN AID IN 2014

The tools, techniques and recognized good practices for humanitarian aid operations have also developed with accumulated learning over the years. The cliché of humanitarian aid as consisting mostly of transports of sacks of flour is long outdated. New approaches such as cash and vouchers are more effective in many contexts and bring more flexibility and choice for recipients and less distortion of local markets. Alongside material assistance, be it food, medicine or shelter items, today's humanitarian operations also incorporate non-material elements. These range from basic hygiene awareness-raising to protection strategies and humanitarian work has become an increasingly specialized profession.

The recognition of the key role of local organizations and actors in emergency response has led to an increased emphasis on support to local response capacity building. Similarly, increased understanding of the different impact of disaster on different population groups has led to gender-sensitive approaches, attention to elderly and disabled groups, and child-focused support. ECHO and a number of Member States now require their partners to be able to carry out humanitarian assistance in accordance with a range of policies covering both sector-specific issues (e.g. water and sanitation, food assistance) and cross-cutting approaches (e.g. gender, children).

EUROPE'S ONGOING TRADITION OF HUMANITARIANISM

- During World War II, the sending of food aid to civilians starving in the Greek blockade became the roots of Oxfam. In the Berlin airlift of 1948-49 packages from CARE were a major part of the aid delivered. Another generation of NGOs including Concern and MSF grew out of the Biafra crisis of 1968.
- As European countries redefined their relations with former colonies, the Youandé II convention in 1969 made the first reference to 'exceptional aid' from the European Economic Community to African states. Subsequently the Lome II agreement (1981) with ACP introduced the notion of 'emergency aid'.
- In the 80s EU public awareness of humanitarian aid translated into significant support for response to the Ethiopian famine. By 1982-3 40% of EC emergency funding was through NGO projects around the world.²

THE ISSUE - A CLOSER LOOK AT EU HUMANITARIAN AID

- The EU (Commission plus Member States) is the largest humanitarian donor in the world. In 2013 it provided over €2 billion in humanitarian funding
- 9 out of 10 EU citizens say it is important for the EU to fund humanitarian aid.³
- ECHO works in over 60 countries through more than 170 European NGO partners, plus UN agencies and International Organisations.

Over recent years, the EU has become a keen promoter on the international stage of a 'resilience approach' in aid. Flagship initiatives aim to improve coordination and break the cycle of emergencies, such as the AGIR programme in Sahel. A longer timeframe will be required to assess the success of such programmes enabling a better integration of risk factors into development work, to avoid repeated humanitarian crises.

As learnings on good practice in humanitarian aid have accumulated, the sector has become correspondingly professionalised. The EU and Member States have supported key humanitarian quality initiatives over the years, and today the resulting standards (such as the Sphere guidelines⁴) provide detailed technical benchmarks for humanitarian action. However, the quest for improvement is a continuous one, and (again, supported by EU Member States) discussions continue on the next steps in the further evolution of humanitarian quality standards.

★ CHALLENGES AHEAD

With all the learnings and improved approaches, delivering humanitarian assistance has not become any simpler. There is no such thing as an uncomplicated humanitarian crisis. On the ground, the need for assistance does not only arise from a natural disaster or a conflict situation, but is also driven by existing social, political and cultural factors which determine who is vulnerable in difficult times. On the international stage, there is a temptation to link provision of humanitarian assistance with foreign policy or military objectives. The recent development of an EU Comprehensive Approach for external action in conflict/fragile contexts has taken into account the principled and needs-based nature of humanitarian aid: still ensuring that this works in practice in the real world of complex crises and multiple actors will continue to present challenges for humanitarian and non-humanitarian colleagues alike.

The scale of humanitarian needs will continue to challenge the EU and its Member States. The level of basic assistance needed by millions of the Syrian population, both inside and outside of Syria itself, is the most obvious mind-boggling example. At the same time, humanitarian budgets are being reduced in many Member States, the pressure on the EU budget itself is clear, and the number of other major crises, not to mention situations of forgotten need, is on the increase.

While NGOs and other EU humanitarian actors continue efforts to make available funds stretch as far as possible, the workload associated with

administering public funds for humanitarian aid continues to rise. NGOs are keen to be accountable for public money; however, the balance between appropriate accountability measures and light information systems which allow efficiency and flexibility has not been found. On the contrary, EU donors need to be aware of the real risk of reducing their humanitarian partners' effectiveness by the ever increasing volume of information required related to any one project or partnership.

★ FINDING THE WAY FORWARD

The above challenges should not be underestimated. The European Commission together with Member States has become a leading global humanitarian player, but complacency is not an option in the current context. Constant political effort is required to safeguard the needs-based, principled nature of humanitarian aid, and in budgetary discussions to ensure that people in severe need do not become the victims of current financial pressures.

Upcoming international events provide opportunities for Europe to contribute to continued improvement in preparation and response to emergencies. The Hyogo Framework for Action, the international agreement on Disaster Risk Reduction will be renewed in 2015. The EU's humanitarian experience in handling extreme events makes it well-placed to promote the need for basing development strategies on risk analysis, and tackling the underlying causes of vulnerability to disaster.

Preparations for the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 also provide a chance to showcase and share the EU's solid humanitarian experience with other actors, including newer donors. The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid is a key tool with a long shelf-life that should both continue to shape policy, and be used to guide programming; it is also very pertinent to the themes identified for the World Humanitarian Summit.

And at EU and national level, dialogue between policy-makers and the EU's community of humanitarian partners - including hundreds of professional NGOs working daily in the world's disaster areas - can ensure that in the messy world of catastrophes and conflicts EU actors can continue to offer professional assistance on the simple basis of human need.

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VOICE Secretariat

1. HPG working paper June 2013 *A History of the humanitarian system* <http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8439.pdf>

2. ECHO@20 archive http://ec.europa.eu/archives/echo20/index_en.htm

3. 2012 Special Eurobarometer 384 http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_384_en.pdf

4. <http://www.sphereproject.org/>

ECHO AS A DONOR - IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT FUNDING

THE ISSUE - A CLOSER LOOK AT EU HUMANITARIAN AID

'A proactive player in strengthening humanitarian principles and values within the European Union'

 Humanitarian aid has long been a strong pillar of EU policy and an expression of European solidarity with people affected by disasters and conflicts. Implemented via a specific Directorate-General - ECHO - and supported by its own chapter in the Lisbon treaty, EU financial contributions to humanitarian aid reached €1.3 billion in 2013, which makes ECHO the second largest donor worldwide.

But over the years ECHO has also become a proactive player in strengthening humanitarian principles and values within the European Union. Collaborating with the humanitarian aid community, it has contributed to successfully influencing the political environment in the European Commission and member states. A strong outcome of this was the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid (2008) which positively shaped changes in EU humanitarian policies and practice.

There are several distinguishing features of ECHO as a donor. It recognises the fundamental need for partnerships with credible humanitarian partners (including NGOs, UN and Red Cross organisations) to implement humanitarian aid effectively on the ground. ECHO has tried to maintain a transparent and constructive dialogue with its partners, be they small organisations or big networks. ECHO enters into long-term partnerships with NGOs via its Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA). It uses a transparent process to screen all potential FPA holders for their relevance, experience, and capacity. This facility provides ECHO with a pool of humanitarian professionals that it knows and trusts, in various disciplines and geographies. This enables rapid humanitarian responses to needs arising from natural disasters and armed conflicts. It can also target resources for specific needs to provide assistance to those most at risk. The partnership approach also helps to develop humanitarian concepts (such as the gender-age marker).

Another key feature is ECHO's worldwide network of field offices for analyses, strategy development and direct interaction with its partners on the ground. ECHO's technical experts are deployed to crisis contexts to identify humanitarian needs, support partners, and advise decision-makers. This makes ECHO not just a donor, but also an informed actor able to shape humanitarian thinking and action.

To realise impartial aid worldwide, ECHO has established a special focus and support for "forgotten crises". Together with the Global Needs Assessment and the Crisis Index, ECHO has developed instruments in keeping with

humanitarian values and principles; it grades humanitarian crises systematically according to needs as a basis for programming. This is crucial as humanitarian aid is always vulnerable to different kinds of instrumentalisation.

Commitment to humanitarian principles has been visible in sensitive humanitarian crises like Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, Somalia or Colombia, where ECHO has had to defend the neutrality and independence of its humanitarian action against strong influences from politics, military or media. Most recently, in the Syrian refugee crisis in Turkey, ECHO (with others) has emphasised the humanitarian principles and the added value of other actors (multilateral and nongovernmental) to advocate for enlarging the humanitarian space. This can enable a wide range of organisations to share the burden related to addressing this crisis. As a result we start to see inclusion of other actors in Turkey shaping policy, delivering assistance and coordinating action on the ground.

Within the increasingly complex political EU environment, ECHO as an institution has managed to keep relative 'autonomy' of humanitarian aid, which is a precondition for effective impartial, independent and neutral humanitarian action. In cooperating with Civil Protection or discussing EU's Comprehensive Approach to External Conflict and Crises, it has maintained delineation of roles and mandates designed to avoid political influence on humanitarian aid.

All of the above complements the profile of ECHO as a major funder. However, recent pressure on the ECHO budget has created many challenges for its partners with inevitable impact on the people they are trying to assist. The disruption created can also potentially affect ECHO's strength as an actor within the EU and in the global humanitarian system. European humanitarian aid, one of the real added values of the common European project, risks being undermined. ECHO has demonstrated that being a humanitarian donor is about more than funding; however, predictable and timely funding remains the core of humanitarian donorship.

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<http://www.diakonie-katastrophenhilfe.de>
<http://www.oxfam.org.uk>
<http://www.oxfamsol.be>

AT THE FRONT LINE: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE “EUROPEAN CONSENSUS ON HUMANITARIAN AID” FOR NGOS

THE ISSUE - A CLOSER LOOK AT EU HUMANITARIAN AID

‘The Consensus states that humanitarian aid is not a crisis management tool, but in Afghanistan, for example, humanitarian aid has often been part and parcel of international military operations.’

 When the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid (the Consensus) was adopted by EU Member States, the European Parliament and the European Commission in 2007, its main purpose was to provide a common framework for humanitarian policies and strategies. While the political value of the Consensus lies in the broadly adopted framework, its endorsement of the humanitarian principles is fundamental from the point of view of agencies delivering humanitarian aid. There is a general recognition of the humanitarian principles as enshrined in the Consensus and the Lisbon Treaty, but respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and for the independence of humanitarian aid by conflict parties in the field is shrinking. Therefore a huge challenge for NGOs delivering humanitarian aid in complex and politicized emergencies is to bridge this gap between policy and practice.

The Consensus states that humanitarian aid is not a crisis management tool, but in Afghanistan, for example, humanitarian aid has often been part and parcel of international military operations. Many NGOs criticized that military, political and humanitarian goals were joined up, thus blurring if not erasing altogether the distinction between military and civilian actors. In 2009 CARE played a lead role in a study on aid and civil-military relations in Afghanistan. The findings clearly indicated that humanitarian principles and international guidelines on civil-military relations were not being respected: "Vast sums of donor funding had been misspent on 'quick impact projects' aimed at buying force protection and intelligence for international forces."¹ Some donors also exerted pressure through their aid funds on NGOs to align with short-term military strategies. CARE and other international NGOs refused to undertake projects aimed at delivering on military objectives. Based on the Afghanistan experience, it is of paramount importance that the implementation of the EU's Comprehensive Approach to external conflicts and crises helps achieve lasting peace and security for affected populations, without making principled humanitarian aid impossible or prioritizing short term 'stabilisation' efforts over longer-term efforts to address poverty.

Syria is another example that demonstrates that without respect for IHL it is impossible to deliver assistance and provide protection on the ground. In order to gain access to Homs and other besieged areas inside Syria it is essential that

there is firm respect for the basic humanitarian principles by all parties to the conflict. Otherwise, humanitarian aid for people in need in Syria will continue to fall short. CARE - like many other international NGOs - provides assistance based on need alone. CARE has called on all parties to seek a peaceful political resolution to the conflict as soon as possible, to ensure the protection of civilians, and to increase and facilitate the delivery of much needed humanitarian assistance in the region.

What needs to be done? The Consensus is an important policy paper, but we need to put some meat on the bones of this document. German NGOs' engagement with the Consensus goes back to early 2007 during the German EU presidency. The Foreign Office and NGOs in Germany were very keen on lobbying for a joint policy on EU humanitarian aid. German NGOs felt that the "Code of Conduct"² signed by more than 500 NGOs was still relevant in terms of content, but lacked teeth because governments had not signed up to it. The adoption of the Consensus in late 2007, followed by an Action Plan in 2008, was a huge step forward to increase the political relevance of the humanitarian principles and to make the commitment of EU Member States more concrete. The VOICE study on NGO perceptions of the Consensus comes to the conclusion that a key challenge is its implementation by EU member states, who should be at the forefront of defending humanitarian principles in the programs that they are funding and on a global level. European NGOs need to hold their governments accountable to the implementation of the Consensus and to an anticipated next Action Plan. This is exactly what CARE Deutschland-Luxemburg and other German NGOs have committed themselves to do.

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CARE Deutschland-Luxemburg
VOICE Board member since 2012.
<http://www.care.de/>

1. As referenced in 'Whose security? CARE International perspectives and recommendations on the implementation of an EU Comprehensive Approach', January 2014, p.2.

2. In 2014 we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the 'Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief'.

VOICE STUDY: THE EUROPEAN CONSENSUS ON HUMANITARIAN AID - AN NGO PERSPECTIVE

THE ISSUE - A CLOSER LOOK AT EU HUMANITARIAN AID

'The Consensus has played a pivotal role in creating a common vision of best practice for principled humanitarian action.'

The VOICE network has been engaged with the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid ('the Consensus') since its genesis in 2007. Having consistently worked to raise awareness of policymakers about the Consensus as an essential framework for principled, needs-based EU humanitarian aid, in 2013 VOICE commissioned a study to look further into NGO views on the Consensus. The result, launched in May 2014 is the report - *The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid - an NGO perspective*.² The study sought to analyze NGO perceptions of how EU Member States have engaged with the Consensus, and investigate the role the Consensus has played in influencing Member States' humanitarian policy and practice, especially in relation to several key themes. VOICE hopes that the resulting report will contribute to a wide understanding of what NGOs consider the crucial elements of the Consensus, and to discussions on the future implementation of the Consensus.

Member States were selected for a deeper investigation into humanitarian policy and practice - in seven countries NGO focus group discussions were held and additional interviews carried out with key informants. The focus group discussions were a particularly exciting moment in the study process. These meetings brought together participants from 62 organisations, providing a lively forum for NGOs to exchange, debate and refresh their interest in the Consensus as a still-relevant cornerstone of policy.

A WELL-RECOGNISED TOOL, NEEDING MORE USE

The study showed that NGOs and EU Member States are united in their assessment of the value of the Consensus, which, they say, derives first and foremost from the humanitarian principles that it promotes. The Consensus has played a pivotal role in creating a common vision of best practice for principled humanitarian action. Many Member States have used the Consensus as a core reference for their humanitarian policy documents.

However NGOs see a gap between expressed policy and application of the Consensus, and believe more can be done to put the Consensus into practice. For example, many NGOs expressed concern over the independence of humanitarian decisions from other government priorities (political, economic, military, etc.). While awareness of the Consensus was high among Member States humanitarian departments, further work needs to be done to share this awareness with colleagues in other policy areas.

The study aimed to highlight good practice in the themes it addressed. For example some good examples of dialogue between governments and NGOs on humanitarian issues were identified. This interaction is essential to enable programming and policy to be informed by operational concerns which NGOs bring from their field experience. Similar practice should be considered by other Member States that have still to develop systematic exchange mechanisms.

The Consensus notes that NGOs are essential to humanitarian response; they deliver the majority of international humanitarian aid due to their field presence, flexibility and specialisation. Funding to NGOs is one way to measure the extent to which governments see this added

THE EUROPEAN CONSENSUS ON HUMANITARIAN AID

European Union Member States, the European Commission and the European Parliament reached an agreement on the Consensus in 2007. It provides a common vision and strong policy framework for the EU and Member States on humanitarian aid. In order to make the political commitment to this framework more concrete, an Action Plan for implementation was agreed in 2008. In its mid-term review of 2010 it was noted that important progress has been made in relation to promoting humanitarian principles, sectoral policy development, needs assessments and needs-based funding allocation, capacity building and coordination. As the timeframe of the first Action Plan ended in 2013, the European Commission contracted an evaluation of implementation of the Consensus, which has recently been released.

DEBATING THE CONSENSUS ACROSS EUROPE

Research for the study included a desk review of all EU Member States' humanitarian aid policies and strategies, as well as other documents relevant to the Consensus and its principal themes. An online survey among NGOs (VOICE members) as well as representatives of humanitarian departments of EU governments drew almost 100 responses from 20 different countries. Eight

THE ISSUE - A CLOSER LOOK AT EU HUMANITARIAN AID

'One of the most concrete recommendations is the call for a follow-up to the Action Plan'

value and look to them to provide humanitarian assistance. The study found that positive interaction between Member States and their NGOs including in policy discussion does not consistently translate into actual funding, and that donor funding does not reflect the comparative advantages and proportion of aid delivered by NGOs- instead, Member States continue overwhelmingly to favour UN agencies when allocating humanitarian budgets.

The study also looked at issues promoted in the Consensus such as the reduction of administrative requirements on partners. The administrative burden related to managing funds from EU donors is a significant concern for NGOs; this is not only a question of reporting, but can relate to donor information requirements at many different stages of the project cycle. VOICE members will continue to discuss with governments the appropriate balance between administrative requirements and flexibility, and at what point these start hampering the effectiveness of humanitarian operations and the efficient use of resources.

Some areas of the Consensus, it seems, remain largely ignored and require greater attention, not only on the part of governments, but also by NGOs in their advocacy efforts to improve the quality and scope of humanitarian aid from the EU and its Member States. The review found that the areas of DRR (disaster risk reduction), preparedness and LRRD (linking relief, rehabilitation and development) are particular examples of this. The study also looks at how the Consensus' attention to capacity building and local partnership has been implemented.

Key issues relevant to NGOs covered by the study include:

- awareness and application of the Consensus
- humanitarian principles
- coordination among humanitarian stakeholders
- funding and administrative requirements
- the wider context of humanitarian action, including Disaster Risk Reduction, Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development, local partners & capacity building

1. [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX-X-42008X0130\(01\)&rid=2](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX-X-42008X0130(01)&rid=2)

2. <http://www.ngovoice.org/documents/20140513%20Final%20NET%20VOICE%20Study%20Consensus%20on%20Humanitarian%20aid.pdf>

3. http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/evaluation/2014/european_consensus_main_en.pdf

★ THE CONSENSUS IN ACTION - WHAT NEXT?

The European Commission has also recently published its evaluation³ of the Consensus and its Action Plan. Many of the issues raised from an NGO perspective in the VOICE study are echoed in the evaluation findings. Together they give a substantial basis for discussion on the next steps in terms of continued implementation of the Consensus in EU and Member states' humanitarian policies and practice.

One of the most concrete of the recommendations in the VOICE study is the call for a follow-up to the Action Plan as a tool to support a coordinated and collective approach to agreed priorities. This could ensure that Member States and EU institutions continue their coordination and reflection on policy and practice in relation to the Consensus. VOICE members will be engaging actively to advocate for a follow-up mechanism that can respond to the findings and recommendations of our study.

The Consensus itself is not a legally binding instrument. To ensure its ongoing collective implementation, it is incumbent upon all stakeholders to continue to raise awareness of the Consensus across the Member States' services and to engage with one another on issues when and where they arise. The commitment to the principles underlined in the Consensus must be maintained. Preparations for the upcoming World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 provide a vital opportunity to reaffirm the European commitment to the Consensus and to promote the core humanitarian principles which underpin it. The Consensus gives a good foundation for EU contributions towards the Summit. We hope that the years ahead will see both a coordinated continued application of the Consensus by EU Member States drawing on dialogue with their humanitarian partners, and the further sharing of the essence of the Consensus at an international level, including with emerging donors and new actors.

VOICE study *The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid - an NGO perspective* can be found on the VOICE website. Hard copies can be requested from the VOICE Secretariat.

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EU HUMANITARIAN FUNDING: THE COST OF UNPREDICTABILITY

THE ISSUE - A CLOSER LOOK AT EU HUMANITARIAN AID

'The impact is being felt in the scale and scope of humanitarian response with reduced operations, and in the relationship we have with other actors in the humanitarian system.'

An NGO's perspective arguing for the urgent need for a predictable level of funding to enable humanitarian assistance to most vulnerable populations.

★ WHAT IS THE STATE OF PLAY?

The humanitarian INGO sector was alarmed in January this year when ECHO announced it might need to reduce by 50% its funding for 2014. As of 1st January ECHO was short of €400 million to implement its 2014 yearly programming around the world. Each EU budget line consists of a payment and a commitment level. The whole European Commission (including ECHO) makes its annual programming on the basis of commitments while over recent years Member States have rather contributed towards the EU budget on the so-called 'payment level' which is lower. This, combined with huge crises such as Syria, South Sudan and Philippines last year, has caused an accumulated shortfall in humanitarian funding. The impact of this situation is felt particularly dramatically by humanitarians like Save the Children because of the rapid project cycle and the need for cash in 'real time.'

In the first months, the main challenge faced by humanitarian INGOs was understanding the situation and its root causes, while colleagues from across the sector have had to put in place mitigating measures to cope with this exceptional situation.

After overcoming some initial hiccups in communication, a more constructive dialogue, through the VOICE network, has been established between ECHO and implementing partners, allowing for emergency plans and operational strategies to cope with the funding shortfall - at least temporarily. ECHO introduced a phased approach to contracting as the best option for the first half of the year. ECHO's very dedicated staff has been focusing on reviewing, re-formulating and developing programs based on different scenarios; whilst equally dedicated INGO teams have been adjusting programming plans, and engaging in information sharing with colleagues on the ground who are far from Brussels decision-making and are facing the sharp end of these funding cuts. In all, a lot of time and energy have been allocated to this

effort, diverting crucial attention and resources from saving lives during a period where there are an unprecedented number of major crises to which humanitarians are currently responding.

At the VOICE General Assembly in May the ECHO Director General reasserted ECHO's commitment to fulfill its obligations and implement in full the Worldwide Decision by the end of the year. Private advocacy towards Member States resulted in ECHO successfully securing €150m through an internal Commission transfer in April. The Commission presented a budget amendment for 2014 in May to secure the remaining €250m that ECHO needs to fund the World Wide Decision. In the 2015 budget proposal, the level of payments is raised to the level of commitments to further ensure predictable and timely humanitarian funding at the level outlined in the Multiannual Financial Framework, and to ensure minimal ongoing operational impact of the 2014 situation. The request for humanitarian aid represents only a small part of the total request for payment appropriations to the whole EC budget in the 2014 amending budget. The new European Parliament and the Council are expected to negotiate and vote on these proposals in the autumn. On the basis of the budget proposals, ECHO has begun its second phase of 2014 contracting in order to continue to respond to needs which cannot be postponed. However, in order to stretch available funds as far as possible, the level of pre-financing to NGOs under these contracts is considerably lower than normal, which can present problems for some partners.

★ WHAT IS THE IMPACT?

The reduced availability of funding and further unpredictability is having huge impact on Save the Children's capacity to respond to increasing humanitarian needs. This is particularly the case in protracted crises but also in very complex emergencies such as Syria. The impact is being felt in the scale and scope of humanitarian response with reduced operations, and in the relationship we have with other actors in the humanitarian system.

ECHO is also a major donor and player in the global humanitarian system. The unexpected changes in the EU funded responses to pre-identified humanitarian needs and the changes

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to strategies that were developed in consultation with local partners and local authorities, have also affected the trust and solidity of working relationships with these actors. ECHO is known, not only in Europe but mainly in the countries where Save the Children works, as being a very reliable donor. The current instability is affecting our reputation and that of ECHO.

The uncertainty and the phased approach are still causing an extremely heavy burden on the administrative departments of both INGOs and ECHO. Again, proposals have to be submitted, reviewed, modified, and re-submitted. This has in addition caused less attention to quality in the details of intervention logic and overall response. The next few months will be telling as to whether quality has been affected on the ground, where it really matters.

To take one example, qualified human resources are key to achieving our results. Working in extremely volatile situations and in very insecure environments is making staff retention a real challenge. Almost all our resources at field level are employed under fixed contracts based on project/action duration and availability of funds. It has become very difficult to offer attractive opportunities under the current circumstances not being able to ensure any sort of work security. A local professional with a family tends to turn towards a more stable employer if unpredictability becomes unbearable, leaving the sector with fewer skilled human resources.

Most importantly, we see that our capacity to make a difference and save and improve lives of those in need is definitely hampered by this situation. In the Sahel region humanitarians know that the timing of the response is critical to ensure the challenges of the lean season are addressed. If humanitarian inputs are not delivered within a specific period, the impact on food security after the next harvesting season will be disastrous.

★ STORMY WEATHER AHEAD?

While Commissioner Georgieva has been a real champion in making sure that humanitarian aid gets properly funded, several Member States seem reluctant to support the current Commission budget proposals. A new Parliament – many of whose members are coming to Brussels elected on a Eurosceptic ticket – will also

have to vote on this. Securing the full amount requested is far from assured.

Humanitarian aid is likely to be one small part of a bigger fight over the EU budget in autumn, and we will need to ensure that it gets the attention it deserves as a specific budget line for people affected by crisis wherever it strikes, from the ongoing crises in Syria and South Sudan to typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines.

If we want to safeguard ECHO's position as a leading donor towards 2016, the year of the World Humanitarian Summit and key year for humanitarianism, VOICE members and other friendly NGOs need to make clear that maintaining adequate levels of humanitarian aid is vital. Negotiations between the Parliament and the Council need to recognize the specificity of humanitarian aid and ensure the 2015 budget is ring-fenced. A concerted advocacy effort from our sector and allies towards European and national parliamentarians, finance and development ministries and via the media, is more necessary than ever.

We need to be prepared to tell the story of the importance of EU humanitarian aid. We need to be communicating in clear and understandable terms about how ECHO funding is reaching directly 120 million people every year at a cost of less than 1% of the EU budget (or a mere 2 euros per EU citizen). That 1 euro spent in DRR saves up to 7 euros in relief efforts, and that ECHO is a leading donor without which some 489 million people in need over the last 4 years in Syria, Philippines, CAR, Sahel, Haiti and Horn of Africa would not have benefitted from life-saving assistance.

For NGO colleagues and partners thousands of miles and a world away from the complex and bureaucratic decision-making machinery here in Brussels – clarity and certainty is key to managing the crisis, so that they can prepare and withstand the disruption of funding and keep delivering vital work to save countless lives where it matters.

Ester Asin and Cecilia Roselli
Save the Children

VIEW ON THE EU: INTERVIEW WITH MR. FRANCOIS BELLON, ICRC

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Mr. François Bellon is the Head of Delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)'s Delegation to the EU, NATO and the Kingdom of Belgium.
<http://www.icrc.org/eng>

This interview by Celia Cranfield (VOICE) took place on 15 July 2014.

The ICRC responds to crises around the world alongside other humanitarian actors. What do you think are the key challenges and concerns at this moment for humanitarian aid?

We should first underline that with the increased number of conflicts around the world, there is clearly an increase in humanitarian needs. There is the highest number of displaced people since the Second World War. There are more needs and not necessarily more resources.

On the operational priorities, access is key to being able to reach those in need. To be allowed to provide humanitarian assistance is no longer taken for granted. Proximity is another key element because we cannot provide humanitarian assistance to the field from Europe. You need to be close to those in need to better understand their needs. It is good that increasingly beneficiaries are consulted.

The third challenge is acceptance. The old policy to provide humanitarian assistance without necessarily asking is finished. It was based on needs and evaluations, but in the end it was the humanitarians who were deciding what should be provided; while now more and more there is a dialogue.

Last but not least, security: for an organisation like ICRC, our word is our only security as we cannot ask for military escort. We want to stay clearly independent, but security cannot be taken for granted in today's globalised environment.

The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid is the main policy document for EU humanitarian aid. Its action plan expired in 2013. What do you see as its main achievements? How should this be developed in the future?

One of the smartest contributions of the humanitarian community to EU dialogue and cooperation is clearly the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. Yes, it is not a directive, or a regulation, or law, - but it is the written commitment of the EU for any new Parliament, new Commission, and even new governments in the Member States.

It confirms again that EU aid has to be provided on the basis of needs. It recognises a diversity of humanitarian actors, and the role of each one. It also recognises that EU humanitarian aid should not be instrumentalised for political purposes or used as a tool of crisis management. All in all, it's an excellent document.

This action plan has been a good tool. It says in

black and white what needs to be done. Let's continue with a similar approach and a new action plan for the five coming years. We don't have such a strong document at UN level.

The EU is the world's largest humanitarian donor, with ECHO contributing to the humanitarian community not only with funds but also as a policy-maker. How do you see this?

First and foremost, ECHO is a donor; a very generous donor. It can also relay to the EU institutions a number of messages coming from humanitarian organisations. We have seen in the last 5 years that ECHO and the Commissioner have been active defenders of 'good' humanitarian action. They said it should not be instrumentalised by the EU, and in this way we thank them for being very assertive. In the last 22 years ECHO has also gained knowledge on policy and wishes to shape policy. This needs to be done with much dialogue and in partnership - the ICRC for example has been developing policy guidelines (called ICRC doctrines¹) for over hundred years.

ECHO partners with NGOs, the Red Cross and the UN to deliver humanitarian aid. How do you see the role of NGOs in the future?

The role of NGOs is tremendous. We cannot even question it. The UN and Red Cross family are kind of like institutions, but the NGOs reflect civil society - so they also reflect a certain free thinking. The Red Cross shares with NGOs the urge to be close to beneficiaries and to have this proximity with people.

NGOs will continue to turn to local capacity. This is a common agenda. The main quality challenge both for you and for us will be to remain down in the field where we wish to provide aid. In the past we had other challenges but now I would say that the biggest challenge is being authorised to operate.

We can also question ourselves on who is working in the field in difficult conflict areas? There are many organisations working in humanitarian aid, including many NGOs, but there are still questions as to which organisations have capacity to meet needs in really difficult places. So at a certain moment it is useful to question, if you need so many NGOs? ECHO has nearly 200 partners.

I'd like to add that in the Brussels environment, the

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representation of NGOs along with the UN and the Red Cross is extremely important. We are the ones who are really deployed, and who are doing the work and I find our dialogue very positive. Our joint work on the EU Aid Volunteers where we took a common position on the fact that volunteers should not be deployed in conflict areas was a good example, and I was happy to see our common view on this taken into the final proposal.

There is a trend to seek 'innovative solutions' for funding of humanitarian aid. How do you see this developing and affecting the delivery of aid to crisis affected people?

In a period of economic crisis and scarce resources let's first recognise the generosity of the EU and the humanitarian aid allocations in the Multiannual Financial Framework. In this sense humanitarian aid is a part of EU's efforts to bring solidarity in its external policy. Nowadays we are so many - NGOs and other actors - who are linked to a crisis and asking for money. It is clear that however generous the EU is, it cannot address all needs. Secondly - the total EU humanitarian envelope is actually not very big. Roughly 800 million euros is intended to cover the EU's humanitarian contribution related to all natural and man-made disasters. It is obvious that funding related to resilience and to transition programmes should not be funded from ECHO but from development. In this regard we also need flexible additional funding from DEVCO- to be effective, this funding needs to be a little quicker, lighter and less bureaucratic.

EU policy has placed an increased emphasis on developing 'resilience'. What is your opinion on the effectiveness of the resilience approach, especially in humanitarian aid?

It's the new buzzword: before it was 'coordination', now it's resilience. ICRC refers to transition, or a 'continuum of aid'. After emergencies and before development there is place for transition. When I was in the field in the 90s, we were pleading to donors to fund these programmes addressing consequences of wars that took place 5-6 years earlier. Often there is no more 'emergency' but there are still needs. Yet all the money goes first to what is interesting in the media. For us there is nothing very new to the resilience approach, but we will be satisfied if it means that everybody now wants to pay to help cover the transition gap.

With the first World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul coming up in 2016, where do you think the focus should be?

It could be an interesting moment when questions around humanitarian aid will be put at the centre of one global UN conference. It's not often this happens; although of course the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has its own regular conference, this will be different. It will be an opportunity to focus on what should be the best systems for effective delivery of humanitarian assistance. It will be a good time to review how we proceed, and to think, for example, about the distinction between a humanitarian organisation and a donor. Each one has a role and humanitarian actors often say that politicians should not discuss humanitarian issues. On the contrary - they have to discuss humanitarian issues! They have to take decisions. What we do not want is that they instrumentalise humanitarian aid by using it as a tool for other policy goals!

Some people believe the Geneva Conventions are outdated and no longer respond to the realities on the ground in situations of armed conflict. What is your response to this?

It's true that after 9/11 many questioned the relevance of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). 13 years on we can see that a large majority of states support the ICRC which shaped IHL 150 years ago. In the last decade we have spoken so much about IHL. This is quite encouraging. Now the problem is not if IHL is relevant as we all agree that it is: the question is how to make IHL better complied with.

There have been some important developments in the recent years, for example the establishment of the International Criminal Court. Nothing is perfect: for example, we could improve the protection of detainees particularly in non-international armed conflicts. We are starting consultation with states to see what can be done in this field.

At the last International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, it was agreed that ICRC jointly with Switzerland, as depositary of the Geneva Conventions, and others will look into questions of how we can improve the mechanisms for controlling the implementation of IHL.

To conclude, I would like to say that it is indeed of the utmost importance that Member states of the EU and the EU institutions not only respect but also ensure respect of IHL and supports its future development.

1. ICRC doctrine is the body of documents adopted by the ICRC Assembly with a view to providing long-term inspiration and guidance for the organisation's action and thinking. It takes into account the external environment and is based on: the practice, history and Statutes of the ICRC; the Fundamental Principles and the Statutes and resolutions of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement; and IHL. The main purpose of developing and codifying doctrine is to ensure that the action of the ICRC and its representatives is both consistent over time and more predictable and credible in the actions it undertakes to fulfill its mandate.

WHY IS EU HUMANITARIAN AID IMPORTANT?

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Every year the VOICE General Assembly draws up a policy resolution reflecting the network's current concerns. The world is again facing an increasing number of severe humanitarian crises that have serious impacts at national, regional and international levels. In May 2014 VOICE Members called on the European Commission, the 28 Member States in the Council of the European Union and the newly elected Members of the European Parliament to support the delivery of needs-based and principled humanitarian aid and ensure timely predictable funding.

★ VOICE 2014 GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION

Disasters, natural and man-made, are increasing in frequency, severity and complexity. At a time when the world is again facing an increasing number of severe humanitarian crises that have serious impacts at national, regional and international levels, EU humanitarian aid is even more relevant than ever to save lives, alleviate suffering and prepare grounds for longer term development. In addition to effects of natural disasters, the humanitarian community is now witnessing spiralling needs of crisis-affected populations due to conflicts in Syria, Central African Republic and South Sudan and due to a combination of conflict and climate change in Somalia.

EU humanitarian aid is spent on lifesaving assistance such as food, nutrition, shelter, healthcare and medical support, water, sanitation, protection and disaster preparedness. The Commission's department for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO) assists around 120 million people every year focusing on the most vulnerable who are affected by disasters.

The EU including its Member States may be the leading donor of humanitarian aid worldwide but the amount spent through the Commission is less than 1% of the EU's annual budget (equivalent to €2 per EU citizen). 9 out of 10 EU citizens say it is important for the EU to fund humanitarian aid.¹ EU humanitarian aid is delivered by over 200 professional partners, primarily NGOs as well as the Red Cross movement and the UN. EU aid is guided by a policy framework, the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, (hereafter 'Consensus') which commits the EU and its Member States to the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. Reaching out to people in need across the world, humanitarian aid is essential in demonstrating the solidarity of European citizens towards those affected by disasters.

★ THE ADDED VALUE OF EUROPEAN HUMANITARIAN NGOS

NGOs are the main deliverers of humanitarian aid to crisis affected populations worldwide, providing aid where it is most needed, in accordance with humanitarian principles. The members of the VOICE network have a wealth of professional, diverse and specialised expertise, and work in close partnership with affected communities and local civil society organisations. We are a direct expression of active European citizenship. We are constantly seeking to improve the quality of our work and are committed to mobilising rapidly and preserving our flexibility and cost-effectiveness. NGOs are supported by citizens in their own countries across the European Union, and are often strongly backed by private financial contributions as well as funding from their own governments.

★ WHAT CAN YOU DO TO SUPPORT EUROPEAN HUMANITARIAN AID?

The VOICE network calls upon the Commission, the European Parliament and the 28 Member States in the Council of the European Union to support the delivery of needs-based and principled humanitarian aid through the following actions:

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1. Ensure continued EU humanitarian leadership and representation on the international stage

- A strong and visible European Commissioner for humanitarian aid brings EU humanitarian leadership to the world stage, as demonstrated over recent years.
- The Commissioner has an important role in promoting the values of principled needs-based humanitarian aid, and of working with professional humanitarian partners.
- The European Parliament should appoint a proactive standing Rapporteur on humanitarian aid.

2. Ensure respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and the humanitarian principles

- The EU should continue to insist on the importance of humanitarian access to crisis-affected people as well as monitor and use its influence to address breaches of IHL.
- The Action Plan to the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid expired in 2013. The Commission and Member States should develop and deliver on a follow-up Action Plan, to ensure continued joint implementation of the principles of the Consensus.
- Fragile States and conflict situations are the contexts where the majority of EU humanitarian aid is delivered. The recently set-up EU Comprehensive Approach seeks to develop integrated strategies for EU external action in such crises. However, the humanitarian community is concerned that the linking of humanitarian aid to political objectives in this sort of approach can threaten the security of aid workers and the affected populations they are assisting. Humanitarian aid should always be given in line with the European Consensus, which states that humanitarian aid is not a crisis management tool.

3. Commit to predictable and timely funding for humanitarian aid

- Recent EU humanitarian funding shortfalls are having an impact on crisis-affected populations. The European Parliament and Council must vote for additional resources for humanitarian aid when the Commission presents its Draft Amending Budget later this year. This is necessary to implement all EU humanitarian operations in 2014 as planned.
- To ensure predictable humanitarian funding and maintain a consistent level of assistance to crisis-affected populations, the European Parliament and Council must agree to raise the payment credits for humanitarian aid to the level of commitment credits in the 2015 EC budget.

4. Support better linking of Relief and Development

- The EC and Member States must include Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in development and recovery programmes. This is necessary to reduce the impact of disasters on affected populations. Development of more flexible funding approaches between the EC institutions is crucial to build bridges between humanitarian and development work.
- Recently, the EU has placed increased emphasis on approaches that support community resilience.² Improving accountability in following up the Commission Communication on Resilience is needed and will contribute to more coordinated and effective measures to bolster the EU's efforts in DRR and in linking relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD).

1. 2012 Special Eurobarometer 384:
http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_384_en.pdf

2. The EU Approach to Resilience:
Learning from Food Security Crisis (COM(2012) 586 final:
http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/resilience/com_2012_586_resilience_en.pdf & Action Plan for Resilience in Crisis Prone Countries SWD (2013) 227 final
http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/resilience/com_2013_227_ap_crisis_prone_countries_en.pdf

★ WHY SHOULD YOU SUPPORT EUROPEAN HUMANITARIAN AID AND NGOS?

EU humanitarian aid saves lives and alleviates suffering, and is an expression of the shared European value of solidarity. It has strong citizen support and has demonstrated that it is taxpayers' money well spent. NGOs are the main deliverers of humanitarian aid to crisis-affected populations worldwide. Their added value includes flexibility, professionalism and cost-effectiveness.

PROVIDING BASIC NEEDS AND HOPE IN A WAR-TORN COUNTRY - SOUTH SUDAN

FROM THE FIELD

'The UN's top official in South Sudan, has warned that the country could face the worst famine the world has seen since that in Ethiopia in the mid-1980s'

 In 2013, the humanitarian situation was stabilising or even improving in some areas of South Sudan, including food security and livelihoods. These gains are likely to be reversed now, with a serious impact on people's health and nutritional status. As many as seven million people are at some risk of food insecurity, both in areas struck by violence and in the country as a whole, where food insecurity is expected to rise.

The humanitarian situation has deteriorated sharply since violence broke out on 15 December 2013. This has made humanitarian operations more critical, and at the same time, more difficult. Though full-scale violence is hard to gauge, at least 900,000 people have been forced from their homes, and thousands killed or injured. A severe food shortage is evident, as major supply routes are shut due to insecurity and impassable, muddy roads. Also, due to the insecurity, farmers are unable to plant their seasonal crops. Humanitarian organisations are restricted in their movements to bring relief aid, as locations are sometimes unsafe to access because of active fighting. Toby Lanzer, the UN's top official in South Sudan, has warned that the country could face the worst famine the world has seen since that in Ethiopia in the mid-1980s.

Medair delivers and coordinates services through field project teams, with support teams in Juba and Nairobi. We are able to respond quickly in addressing people's critical needs. A team in Renk County, Upper Nile State, assists people living in returnee sites, as well as host communities, with life-saving health and nutrition support and safe water. They also promote good sanitation, health, and hygiene practices. Another team provides the same life-saving services to refugees in Maban County, Upper Nile State, who had left the violence in neighbouring Sudan, and host communities. A third Emergency Response Team, supported by the European Union and other donors, responds to rapid-onset emergencies such as flooding, disease outbreaks, or population movements that occur anywhere in South Sudan.

In a refugee camp of 40,000 people in Maban County, Medair has seen the food-shortage effects in recent weeks. Malnutrition rates in the camp have almost tripled since February 2014. The number of people being treated for broken limbs in local hospitals has increased as many climb trees to pick leaves to eat. Children wait outside our nutrition centres to collect used

nutrition supplement wrappers to lick the inside of them.

The team in Bentiu is working around the clock on the adrenaline of urgency to meet the needs of displaced people who fled a massacre and ongoing fighting to seek protection in a United Nations compound (UNMISS). The number of people sheltering at the base has grown from 8,000 before the conflict to 22,500, all within a compound built to only accommodate UN staff. The Emergency Response Team responded immediately to the WASH cluster's request for technical staff to provide desperately needed drinking water and latrines for new arrivals.

James*, for example, was a member of Parliament and a Juba businessman. He had an impressive herd of cows, and a house for his family. When the civil war ended in 2005 and South Sudan became independent in 2011, he began to hope. However, in just a few days, everything was destroyed: his house, his herd, and several members of his family were killed or separated from the rest. "My heart is broken. I live here in this camp with only a few of my children, separated from my other beloved ones," says James. "My biggest desire is to be reunited." When I ask James about the vaccination campaign, his eyes light up. "We need more of this. It's so good that the measles outbreak is being stopped from spreading further. Medair saves lives. I'm really thankful, and I want Medair to do more, can you ask if they can?"

When he asks me this question, I realise that Medair and other NGOs might not be able to do everything, but what we are doing is making a huge difference: we are giving this man his hope back, and hope brings life.

2 May 2014
Wendy van Amerongen
Field Communications Officer
Medair
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*We have used a pseudonym for security reasons.

REDUCING DISASTER RISKS - THE UNIQUE ROLE NGOS PLAY IN STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE

FROM THE FIELD

'NGOs play an important role in generating knowledge and learning.'

The EU is the largest donor of humanitarian work in the world. It plays an important role in stressing the importance of disaster risk reduction (DRR) and strengthening resilience in both humanitarian and development work e.g. through its DIMECHO programme. Europe is making a difference to the lives and livelihoods of communities living in high-risk areas. European NGOs and their southern partners have a unique role and added value in delivering this difference to these communities.

Two cases (below) describe the main added values of NGOs taken from different projects implemented by ICCO Cooperation.

Strengthening resilience takes different forms¹: from preparedness measures like early warning systems, to mitigation measures that include seed banks; to prevention measures like the use of drought/flood resilient crops. The goal is to increase communities' ability to cope with risks and effects of disasters when they occur. A participatory academic research program implemented and funded by ICCO Cooperation, Wageningen University and PSO showed that the key is to support people in mobilising and organising effectively: 'their agency'. It resulted in a PhD entitled 'Risky Encounters'² as well as a brochure with case studies³. Communities do want to reach out, to extend their network (towards other villages, provincial government, etc.), to increase their capacities to influence and change their own situation. Once people have the agency necessary to work on their risks they will do it. NGOs can facilitate this process to achieve peoples' own agency.

Rooted in their societies, European NGOs and their local partners have great opportunities to mobilise communities in Europe and elsewhere to work on strengthening resilience thanks to their soft skills, contextual knowledge, trust and networks. Village committees are set-up or reinforced and supported to analyse disaster risks, their own capacities and vulnerabilities and to plan and take concrete actions to manage these risks and improve their resilience.

Often these actions involve significant investments in terms of time, materials or even finances by community members themselves.

Despite the great potential that communities possess, certain hazards and threats are beyond the local community's capacities to handle. They need to engage with other stakeholders at district, provincial or national level to manage such hazards and threats and address their root causes. Local NGOs through their bottom-up approach of working can facilitate local networking and dialogue with higher levels. They link and bring together communities, governments, networks, academia, etc. By doing so they increase the ability of communities to influence the hazards they face, e.g. by linking different communities together to approach the local government for changes in regulations or infrastructural investments.

Case Study: Lobby for structural measures to prevent floods in Indonesia

Floods frequently happened in downstream villages along the Juwana river causing humanitarian problems as well as tensions with upstream villages. Local NGOs worked with both upstream and downstream communities to analyse the risks they face. This led to the understanding that it was a joint problem. They were able to defuse the tensions by forming a communities' coalition that successfully lobbied the local governments to make budget available for river management.

NGOs play an important role in generating knowledge and learning with specific expertise built up from working in diverse settings. They share best practices with the different communities they work in. Furthermore they pilot innovations and showcase them to policy makers. NGOs are also well placed to lobby at national and international level and advocate for the root causes of disaster risks. They complement the efforts of communities and other stakeholders in doing so.

Most lives are saved within the first hours and days after a disaster by local actors. Local NGOs are thus well-positioned to respond to disasters because of their continued presence on the ground.

Jeroen Jurriens
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1. ICCO Kerk in Actie, Finn Church Aid and Diaconia ECCB-CHDA (Feb 2014) 'Realities of Resilience. Reflections on supporting local capacities for resilience.'
2. Heijmans, A. 'Risky Encounters. Institutions and interventions in response to recurrent disasters and conflict'. (PhD thesis, Wageningen University, 2012).
3. ICCO and Kerk in Actie, 2012. 'CBDRM and its transformative potential: Re-working power relations to reduce disaster risks at community level.'

Case Study: Drought prevention through community mobilising in Ethiopia

The drought that struck the Horn of Africa in 2011 resulted in huge human suffering. With support of local NGOs, communities in Yabello built water ponds to store water in the rainy season. The local NGO provided support in terms of community organising, raising awareness, technical knowhow and planning. But the communities themselves raised most of the funds to make the ponds. During the following drought period, the water pond prevented a disaster from happening.

A 'SELFIE' ON DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT AND GENDER

FROM THE FIELD

'The complex nuances of gender inequality, and how these are aggravated in emergency contexts still need to be tackled'

★ Gone are the days when humanitarian response meant purely non-food items, shelter and WASH.¹ Humanitarians are being pulled out of their *comfort zones* and are increasingly challenged on two fronts. Firstly, to apply their prevention, mitigation and response strategies to tackle post-disaster gender-based risks - including transactional sex, trafficking, intimate partner violence, and rape. And secondly, to better include and prioritise women and girls in approaches to resilience building.

★ 'NO-MAKE-UP-SELFIE-PICTURE'

Despite the many guidelines,² evidence based research³ and awareness-raising⁴ promoting greater understanding and more appropriate interventions to address the rights and needs of women and girls affected by or at risk of disasters, humanitarian practice still has a way to go. Findings from recent research carried out by Plan⁵ with 318 humanitarian experts (71% female and 29% male) from UN, civil society organisations and donor agencies revealed that:

- Slightly over half of all respondents (54%) indicated they had undergone gender training. Of these two-thirds were women and one-third men.
- Of the WASH experts consulted a mere 16% said that lighting to and from shower blocks in internally displaced person (IDP) camps and shelters was being provided and 21% regarding lighting for latrines. Provision of locks for latrines and showers is not the norm according to 60% and 78% of respondents respectively.

- A third of respondents said that recent humanitarian responses did not have women as part of post-disaster assessment teams.
- Furthermore, half of gender-based violence (GBV) interventions are not targeting men, and over 61% of interventions do not provide safe spaces for women and girls.

How's that for a 'no-make-up-Selfie-picture' of the realities of humanitarian work on the ground? On a more positive note, the issue of gender in Disaster Risk Management (DRM) has at last gained some ground. Key donors are now spearheading efforts to ensure DRM work is no longer gender blind.

★ '#POSITIVEACTION' AT DONOR AND NGO-LEVEL

In 2008 ECHO commissioned a 'Review of Gender Issues including Strategies against Gender-based Violence in Humanitarian Interventions'. At the start of 2014, ECHO's Age-Gender Marker was introduced as a quality assessment tool. At DFID there has also been growing consideration of gender in development and emergencies. In 2013 DFID commissioned a review on Women, Girls and Disasters to inform its humanitarian programming. Furthermore DFID made significant commitments at the High level Summit on Violence Against Women and Girls in Emergencies (November 2013) and the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict (June 2014)⁶ and will be subject to further financial commitments benefitting gender programming.⁷

While the increase in donor prioritization of gender as part of humanitarian response⁸ is welcomed (not to mention long overdue), the complex nuances of gender inequality, and how these are aggravated in emergency contexts still need to be tackled. For example, is it in the remit of humanitarian work to "deal with" early and forced marriage (EFM) and female genital mutilation (FGM) risks? Growing evidence shows that EFM and FGM can increase in post disaster settings.⁹ So aren't we thus bound to live up to the (other) humanitarian mandate of *alleviating suffering* and maintaining and *protecting human dignity* of disaster affected people? Why does this not apply to girls subject to EFM and FGM as a result of their disaster affected family's coping mechanism?¹⁰

Multi-mandate NGOs engaged in humanitarian work, like Plan, have the benefit of applying expertise from their gender advisors and from long-term gender equality programming within humanitarian strategies. At Plan UK, our Gender Equality Mainstreaming strategy has led to DRM staff's greater understanding of gender and better alignment of our DRM and development work. Following gender training we've noted an increase of 40% in gender aware DRM proposals (using the IASC gender marker criteria) with evidence of much greater analysis of gender in our needs assessments informing programme design. We have also managed to "institutionalize" gender within our Cash-for-Work and livelihoods recovery interventions -

FROM THE FIELD

the majority of which now solely target women as beneficiaries. In addition, our community based Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) work is demonstrating an increase in the empowerment of women and girls.

For example, Indonesian girls participating in our DRR projects went from an initial low self-perception to more empowered and DRR informed. As observed in our baseline study, a 14-year old girl in Wolodhesa, Sikka felt that “*we are too small to reduce disaster risks*”. In comparison, in the final evaluation stage a 12-year old girl from Rembang explained that “*we need to prevent flood disasters by building stronger houses away from the river bank and to look after the environment more*”.

★ WHAT'S NEXT?

To leverage the growing donor support for gender and DRM work, donors must ensure gender is not only included in proposal templates but also made compulsory in grant reporting mechanisms and project evaluations. Furthermore donor investment is also needed for:

- (a) gender and protection training and capacity building for humanitarian workers and local service providers (such as police, health workers, teachers);

(b) data gathering mechanisms to inform post-disaster gender priorities for humanitarian response strategies¹¹ - particularly better gender integration in Rapid Needs Assessments, Post Disaster Needs Assessments as well as in ex-post recovery phase planning when access to emergency assistance tapers off (i.e. the cessation of phase-one emergency food/cash distribution); and

(c) ensuring development funding in disaster-prone countries is granted to projects that are risk informed and include contingency planning, as relevant, for the integration of DRR within sector service delivery (e.g. pre-positioning stocks and training for Ministries of Health).

Let us hope that gender in DRM continues to go ‘viral’ and secures a place as a key priority outcome in the 2016 World Humanitarian Conference, as well as the Hyogo Framework for Action 2 (HFA2) and Post-2015 sustainable development goals (SDGs) frameworks.

Kelly Hawrylyshyn
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1. i.e. water, sanitation and hygiene

2. Inter-Agency Standing Committee published its *Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action* (2006); *GBV AoR Guidelines for GBV Interventions in Humanitarian Settings* 2006 [currently being revised, 2014] *UNHCR's Sexual and Gender-Based Violence against Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons: Guidelines for prevention and response* (2003); *Gender, Disaster Risk Reduction, and Climate Change Adaptation: A Learning Companion* *Oxfam Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation Resources* (OXFAM: 2010); *Making disaster risk reduction gender-sensitive: policy and practical guidelines* (UNISDR, UNDP & IUCN: 2009)

3. *Donor Spending on Gender in Emergencies* 2013 (Care International: 2013)

4. UNISDR's 2012 global Disaster Reduction Day campaign focused on Women and Girls the (in)visible source of resilience - see: <http://www.unisdr.org/2012/drr/>

5. This research was conducted to inform Plan's 2013 *State of the World's Girls* report focusing on adolescent girls and disaster. The full report, entitled *In Double Jeopardy: Adolescent Girls and Disasters*, is available at <http://plan-international.org/girls/reports-and-publications/the-state-of-the-worlds-girls-2013.php?lang=en> Note: the research is based on practitioners' perceptions and views and should not be considered as scientific research.

6. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/sexual-violence-in-conflict> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/greening-girls-and-women-must-be-kept-safe-in-emergencies>

7. In March 2014 the International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014 was passed by the UK's Parliament. It was supported by UK's Prime Minister David Cameron, International Development Secretary Justine Greening, and the opposition. The Act has two main clauses: the first places a duty on the Secretary of State for International Development to have regard to women's and girls' rights and gender equality in all decisions relating to development and humanitarian assistance and the second calls for annual reporting on this.

8. Bilateral government initiatives include: the UK government's *Keep Her Safe* <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/keep-her-safe-protecting-girls-and-women-in-emergencies> and US government's *Safe from the Start* <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/09/214552.htm>

9. *The State of the World's Girls Report: In Double Jeopardy: Adolescent Girls and Disasters* (Plan International: 2013); *Weathering the Storm: Adolescent Girls and Climate Change* (Plan International, 2011); *The Impact of Emergency Situations on Female Genital Mutilation* (28 Too Many Briefing Paper: 2014)

10. See illustrative analysis of the overlap between countries with high rates of EFM and their exposure to disaster and climate risks on pages 170-171 here: <http://plan-international.org/files/global/publications/campaigns/biaag-2013-report-english.pdf>

11. See for example the Gender Based Violence Information Management System www.gbvims.org

ABOUT VOICE

 VOICE is a network of 82 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in humanitarian aid worldwide, which are based in 19 European countries. VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor on EU humanitarian affairs and disaster risk reduction and it promotes the values of humanitarian NGOs.

VOICE MEMBERS STRIVE...

- To save lives and prevent suffering
- To respond in a swift and timely manner to humanitarian crises
- To base their interventions on international humanitarian law and principles, such as impartiality and independence
- To follow relevant codes of conduct and best practices
- To have high quality standards of professionalism and expertise
- To have a participatory approach with their local partners in the regions of intervention
- To view emergency interventions in the light of future sustainable recovery and development

VOICE OBJECTIVES 2013-2017:

PROMOTING THE HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES

The humanitarian principles (humanity, impartiality, independence, neutrality) are an essential tool for effective humanitarian policy and operations. Therefore VOICE promotes the relevance of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid and its application. VOICE advocates for clear roles and mandates for the various actors involved in disaster response.

FOCUS ON NGOS AS KEY HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

NGOs deliver the majority of humanitarian aid in the field. VOICE advocates for a diversity of professional humanitarian NGOs and promotes their added value among EU and Member State politicians. The network supports the continuing professionalization of the sector, aiming to improve quality and accountability of aid to crisis-affected populations. VOICE members' operational experience and expertise is used to shape relevant policy development.

ENABLING COLLECTIVE ACTION

VOICE builds common NGO positions through information sharing and gathering members in thematic working groups. The resulting positions are used to influence policy of EU institutions and Member States including on funding and operational practice. To improve effectiveness of its advocacy, VOICE builds alliances with other humanitarian actors e.g. the UN and the Red Cross movement. VOICE also seeks to build bridges between humanitarian aid and development by providing expertise on Disaster Risk Reduction and Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development.

HUMANITARIAN ISSUES AT EU LEVEL

VOICE AT WORK

★ Advocating for predictable and timely funding for humanitarian aid

In January DG ECHO announced to partners that it faced a serious funding shortfall (€400 million) impacting on the implementation of its annual programming. Given the importance of this for members' field operations in 2014, this became the priority for VOICE. In order to understand the implications and to support its members, the Board held several high level meetings with DG ECHO, stressing the need for regular and clear communication to ECHO partners. Resulting measures included two meetings with ECHO focusing on the operational consequences. The VOICE Secretariat has focused on frequent and timely updates for members to keep them abreast of latest developments as well as on advocacy opportunities.

VOICE members on their side mobilised ensuring that EU budget decision-makers - especially at national level - know that what is needed in the field is timely and predictable humanitarian funding. They have been active in many Member States writing to Finance and Foreign Ministries raising awareness of NGOs' concerns and the consequences for humanitarian assistance.

The European Commission has now presented its draft Amending Budget 2014, requesting additional €250 million in payments for humanitarian aid and its draft Budget 2015, raising the payments level requested to the commitments level in the Multiannual Financial Framework. Now that there is the possibility to solve this funding problem, VOICE will continue advocating towards the key institutions negotiating the EU budget, looking for a medium- and long-term solution to this situation.

★ Continuing the work towards the post-2015 framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

VOICE gave input to the European Commission Communication 'The post-2015 Hyogo Framework for Action - managing risks to achieve resilience'. VOICE DRR Working Group welcomed many elements of the final communication which provides a good guidance for European positions for the discussions on the next Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA). However the Group continues to urge for: (1) a focus on the underlying causes of disasters, (2) an emphasis on small scale disasters and local level resilience, (3) the improvement of the accountability by introducing measurable targets and clear indicators, and (4) the resourcing of the framework.

★ Raising the specificity of humanitarian aid in the EU's Comprehensive Approach

The European External Action Service (EEAS) together with the Commission recently released a joint communication on the 'EU's comprehensive approach to external conflicts and crises'. Throughout the preparatory process, VOICE together with Brussels-based humanitarian actors put much effort into raising the awareness of non-humanitarian decision makers on principled and needs-based humanitarian aid. It is therefore to be welcomed that several recommendations have been taken into account: 1) The Communication mentions the Lisbon Treaty and the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, including the Humanitarian Principles; 2) Humanitarians are included from the start of common planning; 3) There is no "one size fits all", each crisis is different. While VOICE welcomes the Communication as a good starting point, the Director also stated that "it is very easy to blur the lines between humanitarian aid and political action, which is why effective communication and coordination between all the actors involved are crucial". The Council Conclusions published in May also refer to the Consensus. However questions remain over how this will be put into practice in the Action Plan to be developed in 2015.

★ Welcoming Habitat for Humanity Slovakia to the network

VOICE is pleased to welcome a new member. Habitat for Humanity is specialised in shelter and early recovery. Their work encompasses housing, microfinance, disaster response and resilience. They are joining VOICE to exchange knowledge and experience and to engage in joint lobbying towards the EU. They look forward to contributing their experience to the network as well as understanding of other 'new' Member States.



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VOICE out loud
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