

In May of this year, governments, NGOs and international agencies came together at the World Humanitarian Summit to discuss the future of humanitarian aid worldwide. Also present, and involved in the process leading up to the Summit particularly around funding, were representatives from the private sector. Humanitarian NGOs and different private sector actors have worked together for years, but increasingly donors, including the EU, identify that there may be further potential benefits of private sector partnerships in times of ever-growing humanitarian need. Such partnerships, though largely considered necessary, do not come without a challenge, particularly when applied in conflict settings where NGOs focus first on maintaining the humanitarian principles and standards. NGOs carefully weigh the benefits and limits of the relationship with private sector actors.

Starting off this edition of the VOICE out loud, **Handicap International** and **Welthungerhilfe** write about the benefits and risks of working with the private sector, and explain what systems and criteria they use to choose companies to work with. Several members give examples of their successful collaborations with the private sector in the field and at home. **HelpAge** writes about the conditions for successfully working with cash in emergency situations with help from business partners. **Mercy Corps UK** showcases how partnerships can vary in different country settings, giving examples from Greece and Syria. Finally, **Polish Humanitarian Action** writes about working with companies to raise funds for programmes in the field.

In the view on the EU, **Civil Society Europe** presents outcomes from civil society reports that show evidence of shrinking civil society space in Europe. The section continues with an interview with Isabelle Brachet from the **Action Aid EU office** on the experience of development NGOs working on the role of the private sector in EU development policy and practice.

The 'field focus' is written by **Plan UK** about continuing displacement from the **Burundi** crisis, the importance of protection for young people in a forgotten crisis, and the work Plan is doing in neighbouring Tanzania to address this.

VOICE

VOICE stands for 'Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies'. VOICE is a network of 85 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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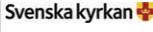
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FROM THE VOICE PRESIDENT



Following the global financial crisis, we see international initiatives to bolster humanitarian and development financing being reconfirmed. The invitation to the private sector to participate in the first World Humanitarian Summit illustrates this trend. In the end, the private sector made 7% of the overall commitments towards the Agenda for Humanity.

Donors, including the European Union, have already shown an interest in leveraging the resources of the private sector to help boost investment, offset the shortfall in development financing and grow business participation in the sector. But what's happening in the humanitarian ecosystem, especially in conflict settings where the humanitarian principles, including independence, are considered so important?

Humanitarian needs are increasing and there is an understanding that more actors than before should become involved. Engagement with businesses on emergency communications and logistics, especially by UN agencies, is in no way new. Examples of humanitarian agencies being amongst the first users of new technologies abound. Under the vague designation 'partnership', public discourse tends to confuse buying new services with being supported by financial resources. When it comes to VOICE members, receiving funding from companies is more common. However, the private sector may have more to offer, such as expertise and human resources as well as innovation, which could potentially benefit the humanitarian sector. So rather than asking whether humanitarians should engage with the private sector or not, the real ongoing questions to ask are: how this can be best be done given ever quickening opportunities and threats? And what are the barriers to pursuing deeper exchanges?

In this edition a number of VOICE members describe some of their partnerships with the private sector from the smallest local businesses, to the partnerships for shared skills and fundraising with bigger corporations. It's clear that more and regular dialogue is needed to bridge the cultural divide between business and NGOs and build trust. The private sector should recognise how much they also will benefit from enhanced interaction, given that NGOs have unique expertise. They are the main implementers and need their donors both private and public to understand what principled humanitarian assistance means in the field.

It's also important for both parties to involve staff from the field in the development of collaborations as early as possible. Contributors to this issue show that it takes investment and time on their part to get the right private sector partners and then to make the partnership work long term. But the dialogue is different in different places. Whether in natural disasters, or during and after conflict, there is a need to support local businesses in order to revive or strengthen the local economy, though context creates wildly different constraints on success. Local businesses are often core actors with an interest in the welfare of their own communities, which deserves due consideration.

One of the challenges which will always be a stumbling block to more partnerships with businesses will be our differing objectives. Often Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been the context in which private sector came on board. Now businesses increasingly seek to engage, recognising that stable and resilient societies are often better for business. When it comes to preparedness and disaster risk reduction the private sector could also play an important role, and several insurance companies are already active in non-conflict situations. However, profit remains the objective. Humanitarian NGOs on their side seek to reduce suffering, save lives and build resilience. So, two very different cultures meet. Developing win-win partnerships which are of benefit to crisis affected populations remains challenging for many NGOs. The question whether businesses turn crisis contexts for people into a market opportunity and on which ethical basis partnerships are best established is one which deserves to be openly discussed for everybody's benefit.

Many NGOs are concerned regarding the drive by the European Commission to push NGOs to engage more with business in the development sector. While donors can play a role in supporting dialogue and private sector engagement, they should respect that their implementing partners, NGOs and other humanitarian actors, must retain independence in their choice of partners in the field. When NGOs seek to engage they must always carefully weigh the benefits and limits of the relationship with private sector actors. How are the humanitarian principles to be respected? What lessons and good practices can be learned from previous partnerships? What new capacities, skills or approaches can be brought to the table? And at what cost to the NGO in terms of time, reputation and choices? The stakes are not quite the same: a loss of reputation for business only means lost business, but for humanitarians can deeply affect their ability to save lives.

Nicolas Borsinger
VOICE President

PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS THAT DO NOT COMPROMISE OUR ETHICS AS HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

THE ISSUE – HOW HUMANITARIAN NGOs WORK WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR

For many years, and again just recently at the World Humanitarian Summit, United Nations agencies and NGOs have been examining the role that the private sector can play in funding humanitarian response. Albeit in constant evolution, the role of corporations in this regard is undeniable, and is now frequently built-in through corporate and social responsibility (CSR). Like other NGOs, Handicap International collaborates with the private sector, but not at any price. The ethics of the corporations funding Handicap International's activities are of permanent concern to the organisation, which has decided to go beyond basic statements of intent from its fund-providing corporations. This is a task that Handicap International has been tackling for more than ten years, through observation of peer practices and in relation to our mandate. As a result of this continuous process, criteria, methodology and tools have been elaborated to evaluate corporations in light of our ethical criteria.

Handicap International uses several levels of analysis to evaluate the ethics of its private partners. The first corresponds to exclusionary sectors for areas of activity that are in obvious contradiction with our field objectives: weapons, alcohol, tobacco, investment in anti-personnel mine and cluster munitions manufacture. Corporations with activities in these areas are automatically excluded from any partnership. The second level of analysis, applied to all other areas of activity, consists in gauging corporations against elaborated ethical criteria (violations of human rights and basic labour rights, predatory or illicit business practices, active contribution to a conflict, environmental degradation, corruption and corruption executive reputation, etc.), as well as acknowledging positive corporate practices (e.g. CSR policy, involvement in international aid and development).

Via this criteria analysis process, colour codes are attributed to corporations based upon their practices: "green" if, by and large, the corporation fulfils Handicap International's ethical criteria, "red" when this is not the case and "orange" when going ahead with the partnership must be made conditional to a heightened level of vigilance in specific areas. For instance, this might apply in the case of a pharmaceutical group which approaches us to fund projects with an "access to treatment" component in a country where the corporation

is not established. Let's imagine the company is free from any scandal or court case and develops good practices (e.g. generic medication development or preferential tariff policies for developing countries). The company therefore fulfils Handicap International's ethical criteria. However, Handicap International would be particularly attentive not to serve as a vehicle for the corporation's commercial establishment in that country, by directing its funds either towards domains other than health, or towards other geographical areas. This is a matter of preserving Handicap International's freedom of choice and action in the countries where we work, and of avoiding the use of our projects towards business-oriented ends.

Ethical evaluation is a team effort that mobilises the whole of Handicap International's international network. The Handicap International Foundation, which provides a framework on political and ethical positioning issues, is the underlying point of reference and defines the criteria, trains the teams and issues recommendations in complex cases. The teams responsible for private fundraising in the countries where Handicap International works also undertake ethical evaluation at their level, using a common methodology and shared sources. The resulting data is made entirely available internally via a database that has compiled over six hundred corporate analyses to date. We continuously re-evaluate our ethical recommendations, which are only valid for a specified period of time, and regularly question our criteria. Indeed, Handicap International recently performed an analysis of the criteria used to evaluate private sector partners, via a benchmark involving approximately forty NGOs from different countries. The benchmark¹ showed that ethical evaluation of private financial partners is an area of true concern for NGOs. Corporations are in a process of evolution driven by the obligations befalling them in terms of CSR, and the role that they wish to play on the humanitarian scene. Evolving criteria accordingly is essential. In any event, the corporations with which Handicap International collaborates are selected neither randomly nor out of mere financial opportunism, but specifically because they meet our ethical values.

Amandine Rave

Ethical and Policy Analyst

Handicap International Foundation

blog.handicap-international.org/

influenceandethics

'Ethical evaluation of private financial partners is an area of true concern for NGOs.'

1. Available upon request.

MINIMISING THE RISK OF PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS – HOW WE WORK WITH EUROPEAN COMPANIES

THE ISSUE – HOW HUMANITARIAN NGOs WORK WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR

‘The challenges in humanitarian and development work can only be tackled if governments, civil society and the private sector work together.’

★ There is no doubt that cooperating with companies involves a risk for NGOs. There are corporations out there that do more harm than good. Companies whose only interest in working with the civil sector is ‘greenwashing’. Not only would their bad business practices counteract the positive NGO work, they could potentially harm any organisation associated with them. This shouldn’t stop anyone from working with companies; organisations just need to have the tools in place to minimise the risks.

★ FROM GUIDELINES TO A REVIEW PROCESS

Welthungerhilfe has always been open to partnerships with the private sector. The organisation firmly believes that the challenges in humanitarian and development work can only be tackled if governments, civil society and the private sector work together. Naturally, we had long-standing guidelines for working with companies. However, they didn’t include any hard criteria that we could measure companies against. Decisions for or against a partnership were therefore arbitrary. As this posed a risk, we decided to set up a process to check companies in a predefined, uniform way.

We set out to find a process to check companies that balances the highest possible reliability with a reasonable use of resources and decided on a three-level approach, where the first step is a simple desk research. At this level, we evaluate three criteria: industry (e.g. textile industry is more problematic than renewable energy), standards (e.g. commitment to International Labour Organization standards) and reputation (based on press clippings). For each criterion, we award or deduct points to reach a final score.

If the desk research shows that the company is unproblematic (a low points score), the corporate partnership officer can decide on a cooperation. If the result reveals the company could have some bad business practices, we assign a freelance journalist with an in-depth evaluation of the company. The resulting dossier will then be given to the Welthungerhilfe board of directors for a final decision.

The evaluation is in principle open-ended. We do exclude some industries (like weapon

manufacturers). Beyond that, even a company with a bad reputation might be given green light if our board of directors believes – based on the investigative research – that the company is genuinely interested in doing good and has learned from its past mistakes.

★ EVERYONE GETS TO TALK WITH US

Sometimes we add another element to the review process: a discussion with the company. Our organisation promotes maximum transparency. Thus, we are open to discuss the results of the company check with the company itself. This is especially the case when a company was turned down – something that happened five times since we installed the process three years ago. It is important to inform them of the reasons for their dismissal and can also be the basis for ongoing talks. Changing business practice resulting from our discussions might even have a bigger impact than outright cooperation.

So far our experience with the process has been very positive. There hasn’t been a single problematic cooperation. It provides certainty to everyone involved in our organisation but also in the companies examined. Its formal structure makes it fair and easy to communicate with companies. We have found that this process is a good starting point to foster a mutual understanding. We learn about the companies’ objectives while we promote our stance as an independent and principled humanitarian actor.

There are still some cases where it doesn’t work. Information on small, local companies in developing countries can seldom be found online. These must be reviewed in other ways. But the next time a European company knocks at our doors for a partnership, we know with great certainty if there’s a risk involved in working with them.

Christian Stark
Head of Corporate Partnerships
Welthungerhilfe
www.welthungerhilfe.de



MAKING CASH WORK: PARTNERING WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR TO DELIVER HUMANITARIAN AID

THE ISSUE – HOW HUMANITARIAN NGOs WORK WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR

‘If the humanitarian system is to meet our commitments for the scale up of cash made at the World Humanitarian Summit, working with the private sector to deliver cash should not only be a ‘need’, it should also be a ‘want’.

★ **Evidence shows that cash based responses are more efficient and effective than in-kind aid, particularly when e-transfers are used and done at scale.¹ Cash transfers present exciting opportunities to re-shape how we deliver humanitarian assistance and whom we work with.**

Last year, a high level panel convened by DFID explored why it is important to scale up cash based responses and what would be needed to achieve that.² A key recommendation was the delivery of more cash using e-transfers and working with the private sector. Using e-transfers can be much quicker, safer, more secure and more accessible than delivering cash using the traditional system of aid workers distributing cash envelopes. Working with private sector companies including financial service providers and technology companies is more important than ever as the humanitarian system tries to scale up and digitise cash. This article outlines the benefits and potential barriers in private sector and humanitarian partnerships to deliver cash transfers in emergencies.

★ THE BENEFITS OF PRIVATE SECTOR/ HUMANITARIAN PARTNERSHIPS:

Businesses are in a better position to invest in developing products that might take years to come to fruition, carry a lot of risk and require a lot of investment. Humanitarian actors often work on a project-to-project basis and are consequentially unable to invest in such solutions, or continue to develop them once funding ends. Moreover, donor scrutiny often calls for quite a low level of risk acceptance. Partnering with private sector companies enables humanitarian agencies to benefit from the specialised expertise and personnel in the private sector. Likewise, service providers can benefit from partnering with humanitarian actors, providing them with the opportunity to engage in new areas or with a new potential customer base for other products/ services they offer.

★ WHAT ARE SOME OF THE POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO WORKING EFFECTIVELY TOGETHER?

- **Lengthy contracting process.** Contracting can take weeks or even months to complete,

causing delays. Humanitarian agencies can be unsure of what needs to be included in contracts with service providers. There is room for different interpretations of donor procurement regulations for contracting third parties to support cash transfers, which contributes to the uncertainty. For example, is the value of a contract with a financial service provider the transfer fees only, or is it the transfer fees plus the amount being transferred to the beneficiaries? This is often open to interpretation.

- **Communication issues.** It is important that agreements negotiated at national level are relayed to field level staff from both the humanitarian agency and the private sector company, otherwise it can affect how the agreement translates into practice. For example, HelpAge in Pakistan have found that establishing relationships with the financial service provider at a regional and community level in addition to the national level helped ensure that information about the cash transfer process was relayed in a timely manner to all stakeholders ahead of the transfers.
- **Lack of mutual knowledge about how the private sector and NGOs operate and the regulations/laws that each must comply with.** This can lead to miscommunication and contribute to lengthy discussions to agree the partnership. Lack of knowledge can also contribute to humanitarian actors' hesitancy to work with private sector service providers. For example, part of the process for humanitarian actors is to first identify and assess the capacity of potential cash transfer service providers based on a number of criteria such as liquidity, coverage etc. However, humanitarian actors do not always feel confident in their knowledge to adequately assess service providers' capacity.³
- **If the benefits are not mutually equal.** The business case for the private sector to engage with humanitarian cash transfer programmes depends on the cost for them, which may vary from being profitable to generating a loss. It also depends on opportunities for other potential gains such as tapping into a new customer base. However, if these mutual benefits are not realised or supported, then strategic future engagement between the sectors is unlikely.

THE ISSUE – HOW HUMANITARIAN NGOs WORK WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR

★ **WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CATALYSTS TO SUCCESSFUL WORKING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES AND PRIVATE SECTOR?**

- a. **Working side by side:** HelpAge in Pakistan have successfully delivered a number of cash transfers by partnering with mobile money and financial service providers. The HelpAge team have found that placing their team members at the vendors' kiosks meant that the team could solve issues, such as beneficiary identification, on the spot. They can also ensure that other essential aspects of the project quality are in place, such as; ensuring the kiosk is easily visible to beneficiaries, sharing information about the complaints/feedback response mechanism and supporting the vendor to ensure the distribution is carried out in an orderly manner by staggering the recipients and managing the queues. At the same time, the financial service provider found that having HelpAge team members working side by side with their kiosk vendors was in their interest, as having staff members present during the cash distribution to consult with, if there are beneficiary verification issues, absolved them of the risk of distributing cash to the wrong person. Moreover, HelpAge team activities supported them to carry out their roles more efficiently and it gave them a better financial business case to partner with HelpAge.
- b. **Partnering rather than sub-contracting:** If the experience is positive, humanitarian actors should think of financial/technological service providers as potential long-term strategic partners and not just as a service provider to support a particular project. Doing so means that humanitarian actors can build up organisational experience and capacity as staff become familiar and confident with a certain process/partner. Moreover, having a partnership allows space for a holistic development of solutions that individually might not be thought of, or officially on offer. For example, the software solutions company Segovia are willing to work with humanitarian agencies on jointly designing projects and developing donor proposals.
- c. **Giving and receiving feedback:** Companies like to hear how they performed and how they can do better, and likewise, humanitarian actors have commitments under the Core Humanitarian Standards to "continually learn and improve". In Nepal, HelpAge shared

the post-distribution monitoring report of the cash transfers with the financial service provider. In return they gave their own feedback to HelpAge and seemed to really appreciate the follow up. Given the success of the programme, HelpAge are likely to work with the same financial service provider again. So, mutual learning to continuously deliver quality humanitarian assistance to disaster-affected communities is essential.

- d. **Disaster preparedness – 'failure to plan is planning to fail':** In the Philippines, HelpAge carried out a cash transfer programme in partnership with a remittance transfer service provider. The company didn't have their own standard memorandum of understanding (MoU), nor did our team, so we had to create one from scratch which delayed the cash programme set up by a few days. However, during the Nepal earthquake response, we already had a draft MoU format. We were able to quickly adapt it for the specific context and programme. As a result, the turnaround from our very first discussion with the financial service provider to signing the MoU was a speedy three days. Mapping potential service providers and having framework agreements in place, or at least draft MoU's and the contacts established, can expedite the contracting process.
- e. **Building up a body of coordinated knowledge about cash transfer services and contacts:** More national cash working groups are springing up on an annual basis, which will further enhance cross-organisational learning and knowledge sharing of successful humanitarian actor/private sector partnerships and services available. ELAN⁴ are also in the process of developing a "cash transfer tech catalogue" which will facilitate the sharing of information about e-cash transfer service providers which will help support disaster preparedness activities such as mapping potential service providers.

If the humanitarian system is to meet our commitments for the scale up of cash made at the World Humanitarian Summit, working with the private sector to deliver cash should not only be a 'need', it should also be a 'want'.

Ciara O'Malley
Humanitarian Programme Coordinator –
Cash/Livelihoods
HelpAge International
www.helpage.org

1. Overseas Development Institute (2015); "Doing Cash Differently: How Cash Transfers Can Transform Humanitarian Aid"; found at <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9828.pdf>
2. Overseas Development Institute (2015); "Doing Cash Differently: How Cash Transfers Can Transform Humanitarian Aid"; found at <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9828.pdf>
3. Frey, Lily; "ELAN Mobile Money Workshop Report"; found at <http://www.cashlearning.org/downloads/mobile-money-workshop-full-reportfinal-1.pdf>
4. The electronic cash transfer learning action network (ELAN) aims to improve how electronic cash and electronic vouchers are used to assist survivors of natural disasters and conflict. It brings humanitarian organisations and the private sector together in partnership to improve e-transfer programmes.

WORKING WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR: FROM CASH IN GREECE TO FLOUR IN SYRIA

THE ISSUE – HOW HUMANITARIAN NGOs WORK WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR

'It is no longer good enough to 'Do no harm'; we must 'Do more good'. This means looking for bold and innovative partnerships, and promoting a culture of independence, not dependence on aid.'

★ For Mercy Corps, success means helping as many people as possible to help themselves, and in our experience we can do this more effectively when we involve the private sector. We learn about new efficiencies and methods of working, we complement local markets, and together we bridge the gap between relief and recovery in times of emergency and disaster.

★ WORKING WITH MASTERCARD IN GREECE

Mercy Corps was the first organisation to implement cash assistance in Greece in response to the European refugee crisis, putting choice and dignity back into the hands of people who were fleeing war, poverty and persecution. We expanded our partnership with multinational corporation Mastercard, using their technology to support our programming.

Depending on size, families receive up to €340 each month via a pre-paid card, while individuals receive €90 a month. They can withdraw the money to spend in local markets and shops, or can use it in any place where there is a POS (point of sale) machine and the card is topped up each month following an interview and analysis of needs.

From May to October 2016, Mercy Corps provided €1,152,270 in cash assistance to refugees, all of which was spent in Greece. Cash not only provides flexibility and choice, it also mitigates negative coping mechanisms and supports local businesses, which has been particularly welcome in Greece. Mercy Corps has received €3million from the European Commission to support cash assistance on mainland Greece and we are currently discussing a possible expansion of the Commission's programme in Lesvos, Leros and Kos.

Through post-distribution monitoring, we know that the majority of people are spending their money on food, clothing and communication (phone credit) to keep in touch with family members and for emergencies.

We believe that cash is an integral component to bridging the divide between urgent relief and longer-term recovery. Following the devastating typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, delivering cash assistance through a mobile banking system enabled our emergency relief efforts to not only help more than 25,000 people rebuild their lives, but also connected many people to banking services for the first time.

Mercy Corps is also working to improve the policy environment for increasing cash-based assistance through the World Economic Forum's principles for public private partnerships¹.

★ KEEPING LOCAL BAKERIES FIRED-UP IN SYRIA

Bread has always been a critical staple of the Syrian diet. Before the Syrian conflict, it was inexpensive and eaten with nearly every meal. Now, during wartime, it's become increasingly important to people's well-being. Syrian families not receiving other food assistance reportedly get 40 per cent of their calories from wheat, mainly bread. And, when paired with complementary items like tomato paste, it provides a nutritionally-dense meal.

Mercy Corps has been consistently working in north Syria for more than four years, meeting the needs of millions of Syrians. As part of our response, Mercy Corps provides flour to local bakeries to help them offset the rising cost of wheat inside Syria. By providing the flour directly to bakeries, instead of families, we are helping to bolster the local economy. This type of programming also helps more people benefit from the programme, because the burden of producing bread in their own homes would require electricity, gas, fuel, ingredients and other supplies many may not have access to.

Through our contract with the local bakers, we provide the flour on the basis that the price of bread for families in the area remains fixed and affordable. Between March and September 2016, Mercy Corps delivered over 5,000 metric tons of flour to 18 bakeries inside northern Syria, and we continue to provide, on average, 660 metric tons per month, which supports an estimated 131,500 people.

International actors, including INGOs and others, have a responsibility to work in a way that supports the local context. It is no longer good enough to 'Do no harm'; we must 'Do more good'. This means working with multinational companies and family-run businesses, looking for bold and innovative partnerships, and promoting a culture of independence from aid.

Elizabeth McLeod
Policy and Advocacy Adviser
Mercy Corps Europe
www.mercycorps.org.uk

1. The World Bank has dedicated a website to resource sharing on public private partnerships, the Public-Private Partnership in Infrastructure Resource Center (PPPIRC) <http://ppp.worldbank.org/public-private-partnership/>

FINANCING HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT AID THROUGH PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS: CASE STUDIES FROM POLISH HUMANITARIAN ACTION (PAH)

THE ISSUE – HOW HUMANITARIAN NGOs WORK WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR

‘Thanks to our cooperation with the private sector we are much more flexible in deciding what to spend the funding on and can thus adjust or extend our activities to the changing situation in our missions abroad.’

★ THE IMPORTANCE OF CORPORATE PARTNERSHIPS

Polish Humanitarian Action (PAH) has been working with the private sector since the organisation’s founding in 1992. Corporate partnerships are essential to our organisation as, apart from institutional funding, coupled with donations from individuals they give us a greater sense of security and adaptability in realising our mission to meet the needs of people affected by humanitarian crises around the world. Currently we are providing shelter and access to safe water, proper sanitation, food, and education in Nepal, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria and eastern Ukraine.

In our corporate partnerships we seek above all partners which share our values, such as solidarity, fairness, respect for human dignity and tolerance as well as transparency. We highly value their contributions to our actions and make sure our cooperation is mutually beneficial.

While it often seems more challenging to find corporate partners willing to pledge their financial support for longer-term development aid operations in distant foreign countries, over the years PAH has developed important lasting partnerships with several companies in this area. We have developed a certain ‘culture of aiding in foreign countries’ with these partners, both in emergency relief and in longer-term development projects. This is due, to a large extent, to PAH’s good reputation and the trust in it from a large majority of Polish society generally, as well as the charismatic public persona of PAH founder Janina Ochojska. Polish companies cherish the rare opportunity for involvement in foreign countries.

★ FINDING COMMON GROUND AND BUILDING CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR) IDENTITY: TWO CASE STUDIES

The following two examples reveal certain common traits in our corporate partnerships – shared humanitarian values and a global perspective, as well as a well-planned CSR strategy.

Electrolux Poland, a global corporation, became our partner in the area of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in 2009. Over the years the corporation has helped us fund several water points in Somalia and South Sudan,

and the cooperation now extends to all levels. The corporation also took measures to engage its customers by running a product-based campaign which highlighted that each water-saving appliance sold contributed to the company’s support for PAH’s WASH actions abroad. Since then Electrolux has been our strategic partner in the WASH sector; we believe that with each year of our co-operation the company is building a better understanding of the specificity and importance of our work and the compatibility between our mission and the company’s CSR objectives.

Another example of lasting commitment to supporting PAH’s development aid is a Polish family-run furniture manufacturer, Meblik. Then an emerging medium-sized business, Meblik came to PAH with an idea to develop its entire CSR strategy around humanitarian aid and our operations abroad. Over the years Meblik has grown to be an important furniture manufacturer with global ambitions, exporting their products to countries across Europe. In 2009 Meblik received a prestigious award, the Benefactor of the Year in the category small and medium-sized company, for its cooperation with PAH. Thanks to the company’s contributions we have been able to build several water points in Sudan and later South Sudan.

Our Polish field worker in South Sudan observes that corporate partners require a lot of detailed information about the projects they are to finance, have high reporting standards and consultations with them usually take quite some time. These aspects must be taken into account while planning joint actions but they also help build mutual trust and understanding between the partners and contribute to ever increasing overall reporting and transparency standards. Another advantage is that thanks to our cooperation with the private sector we are much more flexible in deciding what to spend the funding on and can thus adjust or extend our activities to the changing situation in our missions abroad.

We are hoping that given the present global context and an increased need for humanitarian aid more and more companies in Poland will be actively supporting our humanitarian work and adopting a broader look on interdependencies in the world.

Anna Kucińska
Private Sector Relations Specialist
Polish Humanitarian Action (PAH)
www.pah.org.pl

CIVIL SOCIETY REPORTS SHOW EVIDENCE OF SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE IN EUROPE

A VIEW ON THE EU

Humanitarian NGOs traditionally work outside Europe but increasingly work at home and abroad, as they seek to work with refugees in countries of origin, transit and destination. In their work they continue to have broad support from European citizens. Being a part of European civil society they are affected by the overall climate and attitudes towards civil society.

VOICE invited Civil Society Europe (CSE) to give a picture from Europe on civil society space. CSE brings together 28 European networks of civil society organisations (CSOs) working towards dialogue on European policy around the shared values of Equality, Solidarity, Inclusiveness and Democracy. Its main objectives: to facilitate and enable dialogue between European civil society organisations and policy-makers; and to help strengthen them in their activities and relations with the institutions. VOICE works with CSE on issues of common interest.



A report of a survey of civil society organisations (CSOs) in Europe conducted in early 2016 by Civil Society Europe and CIVICUS shows evidence of shrinking civic space in Europeⁱ.

The survey aimed at assessing civil society's perception and confidence in key civic space freedoms such as freedoms of assembly, association and expression; as well as on key challenges and wider political trends facing CSOs across Europe. While usually considered less problematic for Europe than the rest of the world, evidence shows that the operating contexts for civil society are becoming more challenging in EU member states too.

An array of 300 CSOs in all EU, candidate countries (except Turkey) and beyond, took the survey. They are active in fields such as human rights, non-discrimination, culture, social policies, health, education, environment, development cooperation, gender equality and sports, ranging from grass-roots to international NGOs.

A large majority of respondents feel that the freedom to establish and register an association is not under threat, and that people living in Europe have the right to organise peaceful demonstrations and raise concerns publicly. However, 58,7% consider that there is a tendency towards deteriorating conditions for civil society. In particular, 52% of participants from Eastern Europe consider conditions in their country poor. Examples raised included the increased interference of public authorities in the associations' activities in, for example, Hungary, actions to discredit protesters such as in Romania, or undue influence of businesses discouraging public concerns over real estate companies and land development in Slovenia or the UK.

One of CSOs' main areas of concern is a decrease in financial support – a majority of respondents indicate a decrease for their work, including development cooperation and humanitarian aid, minority and environmental groups. Their operations are further inhibited by the increased conditionality of funding which limits advocacy activities, such as the UK's "Gagging Law"ⁱⁱ. Despite these challenges, increasing demands are placed on CSOs, including by public authorities, because of the impact of both the economic and refugee crises.

Another key concern for young respondents is a lack of effective and adequate consultation mechanisms for CSOs, whose views are frequently not taken into account despite being invited to contribute them. Some point to an increasing distance and mistrust between

public officials and civil society. An increasing bureaucratisation of the public sector often makes it ineffective in developing a strategic vision and engaging with civil society. Recently, the development of measures and legislation in the area of security and surveillance have had a chilling effect on civic space in Spain, France and Austria, causing further concern for CSOs.

In terms of the political environment, 84% of respondents see an increase in nationalism and of discrimination against immigrants and ethnic minorities in Europe, and over 63% believe that recent political developments have led to polarisation between sections of society. Worryingly, for 73.6%, government support to civil society's promotion of human rights and democratic values is insufficient. Over two thirds of respondents would like the EU to do more to guarantee civic space in their country.

These findings are complemented by evidence from the updates on Civic Space in EU countriesⁱⁱⁱ provided to the CIVICUS Monitor – 'Tracking Civic Space' in cooperation with Civil Society Europe. The Monitor is a research tool regularly measuring developments at a global scale. They show the need for an EU wide debate on this issue with civil society in order to address these negative trends and in particular to:

- adopt concrete measures enabling civic space, including within its external action policies and programmes, ensure that civic freedoms are part of the community 'acquis'
- include citizenship and human rights education in national education systems
- launch an awareness campaign on the Charter of Fundamental Rights and EU values
- support the independent functioning and sustainability of CSOs, including through adequate resources
- adopt principles for consultations, transparency and participatory dialogue at all levels to rebuild trust in the decision-making process.

These reports were issued just a few days after the adoption by the European Parliament (EP) of a welcome proposal for a 'Union Pact for Democracy, the Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights' which also covers civic freedoms, and as the EP's Development Committee prepares an own initiative report on shrinking civic space.

Jean-Marc Roirant
President
Civil Society Europe
civilsocietyeurope.eu

ⁱ https://civilsocietyeuropedot.eu.files.wordpress.com/2016/10/civicspaceineuropesurveyreport_2016.pdf

ⁱⁱ *Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Bill*

ⁱⁱⁱ https://civilsocietyeuropedot.eu.files.wordpress.com/2016/10/civicspace_civics_monitor_summary_report_august2016.pdf

A VIEW ON THE EU:

Interview on the private sector in development with Isabelle Brachet,
Action Aid EU office

A VIEW ON THE EU

The EU has gone further in incorporating the private sector in development policy and practice than in the humanitarian field. CONCORD, a network representing over 2600 European development NGOs, has worked actively on the issue of the private sector in development. In this interview, VOICE learns about CONCORD's experience.



Tell us about CONCORD's work on the private sector and the EU approach in development.

Over four years ago, an informal group of members began discussions within CONCORD ahead of the adoption by the European Commission of a Communication (COM) on the role of the private sector in development. This shift towards the private sector started in 2012 with the 'Agenda for Change', then the COM in 2014, and then in 2015 the Financing For Development Conference on implementation of Agenda 2030.

We have been very critical of the COM¹. We believe there is a role for the private sector but there are too few safeguards and criteria for monitoring. The 'private sector' label is broad and vague. These are diverse types of companies with different potential – from micro enterprises in developing countries, to cooperatives, or transnational corporations which can dominate the whole food system. The EU's approach, putting everyone in the same basket, is not what is needed for development. We question if aid money is the best way to engage large profit-making companies.

While the COM proposes innovative tools for private sector investment – like financial tools on blending (mixing grants and loans) – there are no clear safeguards against environmental degradation and human rights violations, or means to monitor development impacts. Investments don't necessarily lead to improvements in people's lives. They may even contribute to further inequality and marginalisation.

Is DG DEVCO supporting developing countries' local private sector/market development?

Policies don't differentiate between local and large European businesses; large companies are not excluded. Some blending facilities managed by the European Investment Bank (EIB) allow support to small and medium enterprises, for example, in sub-Saharan Africa. But because financing goes through financial intermediaries and client-bank information is confidential, it's difficult to assess if schemes effectively deliver in terms of development outcomes. We often don't know who the end beneficiary is and the EIB has no complaint mechanism for local communities. We hope to get more transparency from an external evaluation of EU blending which is currently underway.

Isabelle Brachet works in the Action Aid EU office. She is a steering group member of the CONCORD hub on Agenda 2030 and Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development and works on the private sector in development.

How does this affect NGOs?

It's challenging because the EU promotes an enabling environment for the private sector in partner countries. For example under the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition, legislative changes are encouraged to make land available for investors or to allow seed companies to operate. Yet, in parallel, we see a less enabling environment for civil society. There can be no responsible investments without civic and democratic space for people to say whether they are beneficial to their communities. When trade unionists, environmental campaigners and human rights defenders are being killed or harassed we question the emphasis on supporting the private sector. The role of civil society cannot be replaced by private companies.

What should donors do to support NGOs to work with the private sector?

NGOs have been working in partnership with the private sector for a long time. It's often of mutual benefit; the private sector welcomes guidance on Corporate Social Responsibility and NGOs are a direct link with local communities.

We see in DG DEVCO's call for proposals that partnership with the private sector is encouraged. Funding must also be available for CSOs who want to work differently or more independently, including by acting as watchdogs for human rights violations and environmental degradation. Donors should ask themselves: 'where is my money going to make a difference?' If donors want to go further, then UN guiding principles on business and human rights must² be central; transparency, participation and accountability as well.

Next steps for CONCORD?

The EU is currently preparing a new European Consensus for Development – this is about the role we want Europe to play in the world. There are three trends of concern: firstly, the use of development aid to curb irregular migration. Secondly, the securitisation of aid – aid is better spent on support to justice than directly on security. Thirdly, the emphasis on the role of the private sector, while the role of civil society may receive less attention.

¹ http://concordeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/CONCORDs_reaction_to_PS_communication_130514.pdf?d4ee7f

² http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf

FORGOTTEN CRISIS IN BURUNDI: SUSTAINABLE PROTECTION INTERVENTIONS ARE ESSENTIAL IN EMERGENCIES

A VIEW FROM BURUNDI

'Basic protection programming is indeed lifesaving by virtue of providing a sense of security and hope for children who are still developing to become functional adults and build their society.'

 The political crisis that erupted in Burundi in April 2015 has left over 2,000 Burundians dead and forced over 316,000 persons to flee to Tanzania, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) from the brutal violence, abductions and killings. Yet the world doesn't seem to have noticed. Over 175,000 refugees, of whom 60% are children, are currently hosted in Tanzania. Seemingly forgotten by the international community, an alarming number of vulnerable Burundian refugee children remain at risk of abuse, violence, and exploitation.

Walking through the overcrowded Nyarugusu, Mtendeli and Nduta camps in Kigoma region, Tanzania, it is difficult to comprehend and observe that the Burundian refugee crisis is a forgotten humanitarian emergency. With so many smiling children running around in the dust, while trying to seek any minor attention from new visitors, one doesn't fail to see that the children are the primary victims in this forgotten crisis.

Living conditions in these congested camps are extremely dire. People lack basic human rights such as adequate access to clean drinking water, safe shelter, latrines and even sufficient food, hygiene items and clean clothing. As a result, many refugees face protection risks on a daily basis, in addition to the risk of deadly water-borne diseases. A large number of vulnerable, unaccompanied and separated children, particularly adolescent girls, face increased risk of sexual exploitation and abuse, child labour, physical and mental violence, in addition to the stark trauma they have already suffered when they lost their families, friends and homes.

Therefore, Plan International aims to provide holistic prevention and response to the protection issues experienced by children in emergencies. We are working to mitigate the effects of trauma by supporting refugee children, particularly those separated and unaccompanied, to ensure they are safe from all forms of violence and abuse. To do so, we build on our existing child protection experience in development and work in partnership with children, their families and local authorities, as well as other NGOs, to strengthen child protection systems and community based mechanisms during emergencies.

Over the last year and a half, Plan International UK has been implementing several programmes funded by the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) along with Save the Children and International Rescue Committee (IRC) in the three refugee camps across Kigoma region, Tanzania.

Through protection interventions such as case management, Plan International continues to register new unaccompanied boys and girls to receive the care and support they need, including through family tracing and reunification services, or placement in temporary foster or alternative care arrangements. As part of the psycho-social protection interventions, Plan has set up child-friendly spaces where children have access to recreational activities and psychosocial support in a safe and protected environment, while also providing age-appropriate counselling support through individual or group sessions for children and adults who have suffered trauma. We are also contributing to the provision of essential kits (containing items such as clothing and hygiene items) to the most vulnerable boys and girls.

Through its leading child protection work, Plan International continues to reiterate that basic protection programming is indeed lifesaving by virtue of providing a sense of security and hope for children who are still developing to become functional adults and build their society, including when they return home after having lived in dire conditions, following uncertainty, anxiety and shock.

In a forgotten crisis, protection activities must be considered a lifesaving intervention, in a world where victims of violence become invisible for not making it to the headlines. Therefore, it is critical that specific funding is allocated to child protection interventions, including gender sensitive protection interventions.

Huda Ghalegolabi
Programme Officer, Child Protection
in Emergencies
Plan International UK
plan-uk.org/

HUMANITARIAN ISSUES AT EU LEVEL

VOICE AT WORK

★ VOICE continues to advocate for timely, predictable and flexible funding at EU level

Financing for humanitarian aid has been a core topic for the VOICE network in the past months as it engaged in the Grand Bargain negotiations at global level, contributing in particular to discussions on simplification through the [‘less paper more aid’](#) project and the [donor conditionalities study](#).

On the revision of the EC Financial Regulation, the VOICE network is asking the Council and European Parliament to retain the useful measures proposed for simplification and flexibility of the EU’s rules and that transparency and accessibility rules are applied to the EU Trust Funds.

VOICE and its members are also advocating at national level for a 2017 European humanitarian budget and revised MFF that take into account commitments made to respond to the refugee crisis in the Middle East and Turkey while retaining timely and predictable funding for humanitarian needs around the rest of the world.

★ VOICE active in follow-up of World Humanitarian Summit

The VOICE network has been very active in the follow-up to the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) over the past months, e.g. through the July event on [“World Humanitarian Summit: outcomes and next steps for the EU”](#). The EU and its member states made a number of commitments during the WHS. However, globally NGOs made more commitments than the UN or its Member States (MS), leading to calls for MS to do more and ensure the implementation and monitoring of commitments; see the joint NGO statement [“We must all act now”](#). Humanitarian NGOs also underlined the need to ensure that implementation of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid and the WHS commitments remain complementary and mutually reinforcing.

The VOICE President and director seized several opportunities to spread this message, e.g. at the Convergences Forum in France and at a roundtable in Spain. The Slovak EU Presidency of the Council working group on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA) invited VOICE to brief MS on NGOs’ views on the WHS. This was followed up with a regional roundtable in Bratislava that brought together humanitarian NGOs from EU12 member states and national representatives to discuss the follow-up of the Summit.

★ Influencing the EU’s Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) plans

In August, VOICE held a presentation at the European Parliament Committee for Development on the implementation of the Sendai Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction. VOICE recommended that the Committee:

- pushes the European Commission to have an annual review of the Action Plan
- asks for a mid-term review of the Resilience Action Plan
- calls for more investment in DRR

The DRR working group continues engaging DG ECHO on these issues.

★ Europe’s ongoing refugee crisis and humanitarian aid - VOICE members raise questions and concerns

Over the past months, VOICE seized several opportunities to speak out about the challenges NGOs face with regard to the EU’s approach to dealing with refugees especially in Greece and Turkey. In June, VOICE members approved [the 2016 Policy Resolution at its General Assembly](#), calling for a better EU response for the refugees and migrants who arrive in Europe.

VOICE members also raised the importance of maintaining funding for ECHO’s humanitarian aid operations outside of the Middle East and Greece and the importance of continuing to support Disaster Risk Reduction.

★ VOICE network grows

Lutheran World Federation, Terre des Hommes Switzerland and Polish Humanitarian Action joined the network in June, bringing the total membership to 85 NGOs from 20 European countries.

★ Members’ publications

- Twelve humanitarian organisations, including seven VOICE members, published a joint policy brief on the situation for displaced persons in Greece [“More than Six Months Stranded - What Now?”](#).
- NRC conducted a study on [Institutional donor requirements](#) to understand the total conditionalities put on humanitarian organisations, gauge and improve NRC’s ability to manage them and define some key findings that could benefit the whole sector.
- HelpAge published a report on [“Older Voices in Humanitarian Aid: Calling for Change”](#) documenting the situation of older refugees fleeing from conflict in Syria, Ukraine and South Sudan. The findings illustrate the failure of the humanitarian system to protect older people’s rights or meet their needs.
- Handicap International and NRC publish a joint report on [“Challenges to principled humanitarian action: perspectives from four countries”](#) to increase understanding of the challenges in operational contexts such as Colombia, Nepal, northern Syria and South Sudan.

VOICE out loud

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Editor: Kathrin Schick - Co-Editor: Celia Cranfield

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VOICE asbl (Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies)

71, Rue Royale, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32 (0)2 - 541.13.60

E-mail: voice@ngovoice.org

Website: www.ngovoice.org



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