

CONTRIBUTION TO THE GLOBAL HUMANITARIAN PLATFORM
11-12 JULY 2007

FEEDBACK ON THE PRINCIPLES OF PARTNERSHIP
AND SOME POINTS FOR DISCUSSION
BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

INTRODUCTION

In July 2006, a group of 40 leaders of NGOs, UN humanitarian agencies, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, the International Organization for Migration, and the World Bank created the Global Humanitarian Platform (GHP) to develop better ways of working together in order to enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian response. The GHP was to have a life span of three years and to work at both the field and global levels.

Since last July, Principles of Partnership (PoP) have been drafted and consultations have been carried out in Indonesia, the Panama regional hub, with El Salvador as a particular country in that region, and Zimbabwe.

This paper begins with a brief review of the consultation process on the draft PoP and the questions posed by the GHP Steering Committee and some concerns raised by field colleagues. It then provides an overview of the comments received on the PoP from the countries, as well as from other individual humanitarian actors, and an overview of the replies on the questions posed by the Steering Committee. It must be noted that there was little distinction in the responses received between different points of view on the Principles or the answers to the questions from different actors (i.e. NGO, IOM, Red Cross/Red Crescent, or UN). As such, it is difficult to ascertain what kind of agreement or disagreement exists on the feedback received by different actors. (The reports received from the consultations in each country are available at www.globalhumanitarianplatform.org). Finally, a number of questions for discussion at the GHP meeting, as well as challenges to be addressed, are provided based on the responses and the commitments made at the meeting in July 2006.

THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

The consultation process around the draft PoP was flawed in that there was limited time for adequate involvement of relevant humanitarian actors; there was an unfortunate mixing of the issues with the UN-led humanitarian reform process; and there was little distinction between different points of view. There should have been better guidance on how to distinguish the GHP from the reform process, despite the complementary goals of both. There should also have been greater emphasis placed on the importance of reflecting both areas of agreement and disagreement on the PoP and the questions. Nonetheless, the feedback provides some useful insights that can be applied in the next stages of the GHP. There was a feeling that the consultations were really the beginning of a process, given that there is a need to rethink identities, attitudes, and perceptions for the Principles to really be put into practice.

Generally, the consultations on the draft Principles of Partnership were seen as a top-down process imposed by headquarters, particularly by (national) NGOs. This perception may have been fuelled by the fact that in some places it was merged with discussions on the UN-led humanitarian reform process. In Zimbabwe, for example, the discussion on the PoP was one session of a full-day workshop on the cluster approach, in a very UN context, with the result that there was confusion about the relationship of the GHP to clusters and reform in general. In

Indonesia, the feedback came with a cover letter from the Humanitarian Coordinator to the Emergency Relief Coordinator (one of the co-chairs of the Steering Committee) that talked about the PoP and the clusters as being very much linked.

The selection of the countries where they would be implemented took longer than foreseen, partly because some of the countries suggested last year at the meeting did not want to be yet another testing ground for a new initiative. Given the shortness of time for consultations, there seems to have been a lack of involvement of national NGOs, particularly in the El Salvador context and the Panama regional hub (in Panama, there are only international NGOs and UN agencies having regional programmes). Attempts to get feedback from national NGOs in other countries yielded minimal success.

FEEDBACK ON THE DRAFT POP

The feedback on the PoP was generally quite positive, with no disagreement on the five main Principles or their usefulness. The Principles are seen to be quite aspirational and there is support for them being put into practice at the field level.

Questions were raised around the Principle of “**Equality**” with suggestions that it should be more about “equity”. However, in one workshop, it was noted that “equality among humanitarian actors referred to equity in status not in structure, and referred to the rights and opportunities afforded humanitarian actors rather than capacities.”

There were several suggestions that the language used in describing the Principles could be clarified to better understand the definitions. For example, under “**Transparency**”, there was a suggestion to include a clearer definition of what level of transparency is desired and to whom. There were concerns raised about the principle of transparency versus confidentiality.

There were also questions around the “obligation” to each other under the “**Responsibility**” principle, given that our primary responsibility should be to those we serve. Whether these concepts are mutually exclusive could be a point of discussion. It was also suggested that there is a “shared responsibility, based on international human rights legislation and IHL, [which] should be the framework of responsibility of humanitarian organisations’ actions.”

Under the “**Complementarity**” principle, it was felt that there should be acknowledgement of the known limitations to building on, and strengthening, local capacities in the early phase of an emergency response when the “priority is on reducing excess mortality.” As such, it was proposed that the language be made less strong and less prescriptive to address this concern (see suggested language changes in the annex).

The lack of mention of affected populations in the PoP was noted several times. This concern could be easily addressed by including a reference in the introductory section of the PoP.

There were suggestions for the addition of two Principles:

- **Accountability** to beneficiaries and donors
- **Sustainability** - “through the mapping of local existing structures, organisations (government and non-government); partnership seeking; and capacity development with a view to clear exit strategies.”

FEEDBACK ON THE SEVEN QUESTIONS POSED

There was considerable feedback on what *should* be done, but fewer suggestions on *how* to move forward and apply the Principles. There was a recognition that the Principles will be hard to

imbue across organisations, as they are mostly about people within organisations. Both time and space will be needed for people to understand how to practice the Principles and efforts such as undertaking role plays, for example, may be required to help the process of understanding why the Principles must be applied.

There was a lack of clear analysis of what the real obstacles are in achieving better partnerships and how we can overcome those obstacles. Many of the suggestions have been raised in previous years, but the challenge that remains is how to achieve what is being proposed.

The following is a summary of the feedback on the seven questions that were posed by the Steering Committee to the countries.

1. What practical suggestions do you have to improve humanitarian response and access to humanitarian relief in your country of operation?

There should be a focus on affected populations, not on institutional agendas. Communication should be improved, with a broader range of actors involved and at an earlier stage, where appropriate, and with clarity of roles and relationships (national NGOs (NNGOs), community based organisations (CBOs), corporate sector, military, local and national government). Better qualified and better trained personnel should be hired. An improved funding base is important. More use and improved clarity of standards, methodologies, and protocols would help. Joint assessments and inclusive planning were also suggested.

2. What are the top three things that you would like to see changed in order to improve humanitarian action in your context?

Inclusion, transparency, and reduced bureaucracy were stressed. Improved information analysis and planning; better systems (not more systems); improved coordination between all partners (UN, RC/RC, NGO, military and government); better synergy between national stakeholders (NGOs and government) and international humanitarian actors in emergencies; and strengthening national NGO capacity and particularly improving links between International NGOs (INGOs) and NNGOs, especially in disaster response were also cited. There was a call for the UN to reduce the use of bureaucracy as a smokescreen and an increase in overall transparency.

3. What else needs to change? What do you think NGOs should do differently? What do you think UN agencies should do differently? What do you think the RC/RC movement should do differently?

Increased transparency, inclusion, and better coordination were mentioned. Better preparedness and advocacy for good donorship. Improved and more realistic reporting (what really happened as opposed to what ought to have happened). Better support to local structures and less inward reflection. INGOs need to learn to work better with, and not squeeze out, NNGOs and CBOs. There should be better inter-NGO coordination. UN agencies should improve transparency on financial issues and should not hide behind bureaucracy, but should provide a more effective response. The RC/RC should improve interaction with other actors in terms of coordination and information exchange.

4. Do you find these Principles relevant in the context in which you are working? If you do not find these Principles relevant, what would you change about them?

Generally, the principles were seen as relevant, though they would have to be contextualised in different situations. The Principles are seen as a starting point for a larger process of change that must include affected populations and should not be seen as an end in themselves. Practising the PoP is seen as a challenge, given “big brother” tendencies and the lack of accountability.

5. Are there operational changes that need to be made in order to put the Principles into action or to work better, generally?

Improved transparency, including financial transparency, and inclusion, better information management, and the creation of forums to allow NNGOs and CBOs to participate were stressed. The same rules should apply to all. There should be better visibility for operational partners.

6. What type of mechanism/forum/action do you see as necessary in order to eventually put Principles of Partnership into action?

Various levels of meetings: UN, NGO, RC/RC, and IOs; UN, NGO, RC/RC, IOs, and donors; UN, NGO, RC/RC, IOs, donors, and governments. A review of current coordination mechanisms should be carried out to ensure that meetings or forums add value. Partnership agreements should be redesigned to reflect the PoP. More NGO consortia should be created. The duplication of processes should be avoided. The position of governments vis-à-vis the PoP must be clarified. Compliance certificates could be issued for those organisations that conform to the PoP.

7. What kind of “indicators of success” do you see eventually being put into place to monitor how the Principles are being used?

The inclusion of the Principles in contracts, with monitoring of compliance could be one indicator. External evaluations could lead to certification and monitoring mechanisms. A coherent and coordinated humanitarian response is another indicator. The establishment of inclusive coordinating processes. The number of organisations attending coordinating forums and the number of times the PoP are included on agendas; the percentage of funds going directly to needs; and the numbers trained in the PoP, were also suggestions.

SOME ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION BY THE GHP

This first meeting of the GHP in Geneva in July 2007 is an opportunity to reflect on work done since last year and is an opportunity to agree on ways forward to achieve the goals set out for the GHP over the coming two years.

The Principles of Partnership and their Implementation

- One of the criticisms from the field is that the PoP consultation has been perceived as being top-down/headquarters-imposed. Given that the GHP was created to address concerns from the field, what can be done to reverse such perceptions? What can be done to ensure that the PoP are actually implemented/applied in a way that is not seen as another layer of work being imposed from headquarters, but will be seen as a benefit to operations?
- What kind of commitment can be expected from organisations at the GHP to the PoP? What will each principal do to ensure that the PoP are taken up/applied within their respective organisations?

Improving Partnerships for Better Humanitarian Outcomes

- Have we obtained an honest analysis of what is wrong in partnerships? If we do not have such an analysis, how can we attain it in order to have a concrete context in which to apply the Principles and to work towards better humanitarian outcomes? Without such an analysis, the discussions risk remaining largely normative and intangible.

The Working Methods of the GHP

- There has been a seemingly difference in approach to the GHP from the UN and from the non-UN over the last year, with UN agencies wanting things to be pushed forward quickly (such as implementing the Humanitarian Partnership Country Teams (HPCTs)) and the non -UN trying to obtain buy-in before moving forward too quickly. There have been concerns expressed that not enough has happened to date. Since the meeting of last year, what has been done within each organisation to move forward on the commitments made to the GHP?
- Is the current structure of a Working Level Group and a Steering Committee providing the necessary impetus for the process to move forward (minutes from the meetings of these groups are available on www.globalhumanitarianplatform.org)? Does the representation or the working processes of the GHP need to be changed?

Next Steps for the GHP

- The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has still to take up the issue of UN procurement policies/UN-NGO partnership agreements, although it is part of the Work Plan 2007 and should be discussed during the November 2007 IASC Working Group meeting. The GHP has yet to become a forum for “focused discussion of particular strategic issues, such as accountability, capacity-building, security, or transitions.” There is no “statement of issues of common concern” for this meeting. The HPCTs have yet to be put in place. Are these still issues that should be pursued by the GHP and, if so, how?
- What should be done differently to move the GHP process forward in the coming two years?

*Prepared by the ICVA Secretariat and
shared with the Working Level Group (ICRC, IFRC, IOM,
InterAction, OCHA, SCHR, UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP, VOICE)*

ANNEX:
PRINCIPLES OF PARTNERSHIP WITH SUGGESTED CHANGES BASED ON FIELD INPUT
(SEE BOLDED AND UNDERLINED PARTS)

Principles of Partnership

A Statement of Commitment

The *Global Humanitarian Platform*, created in July 2006, brings together UN and non-UN humanitarian organizations on an equal footing.

- Striving to enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian action, **based on an ethical obligation to the populations we serve,**
- Acknowledging diversity as an asset of the humanitarian community and recognizing the interdependence among humanitarian organizations,
- Committed to building and nurturing an effective partnership,

... the organizations participating in the **Global Humanitarian Platform** agree to base their partnership on the following principles:

- **Equality**

Equality requires mutual respect between members of the partnership irrespective of size and power. The participants must respect each other's mandates, obligations and independence and recognize each other's constraints and commitments. Mutual respect must not preclude organizations from engaging in constructive dissent.

- **Transparency**

Transparency is achieved through dialogue (on equal footing), with an emphasis on early consultations and early sharing of information. Communications and transparency, including financial transparency, increase the level of trust among organizations.

- **Result-oriented approach**

Effective humanitarian action must be reality-based and action-oriented. This requires result-oriented coordination based on effective capabilities and concrete operational capacities.

- **Responsibility**

Humanitarian organizations have an **ethical** obligation to each other to accomplish their task responsibly, with integrity and in a relevant and appropriate way. They must make sure they commit to activities only when they have the means, competencies, skills, and capacity to deliver on their commitments. Decisive and robust prevention of abuses committed by humanitarians must also be a constant effort.

- **Complementarity**

The diversity of the humanitarian community is an asset if we build on our comparative advantage and complement each other's contributions. Local capacity is one of the main assets to enhance and build on. **Whenever possible, humanitarian organizations should strive to make it ~~must be made~~** an integral part in emergency response. Language and cultural barriers must be overcome.