



The NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project

Strengthening Partnership for Effective Humanitarian Response

International Rescue Committee at Ditchley
2009 Conference Report

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On 13 October 2009 International Rescue Committee UK and the Ditchley Foundation invited representatives from international and national NGOs, the UN, donor governments, think tanks and independent experts to Ditchley Park in Oxfordshire for a conference entitled Humanitarian Reform: Strengthening Partnership for Effective Humanitarian Response. The conference was chaired by Sir Jeremy Greenstock, chair of the Ditchley Foundation and IRC-UK trustee.

International Rescue Committee UK was supported in hosting the conference by ActionAid, CARE International UK, CAFOD, ICVA, Oxfam and Save the Children UK, co-members of the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project, a three-year DFID-funded project that seeks to promote effective NGO engagement in UN-led humanitarian reform. The Project used the Ditchley conference to launch its recently completed Synthesis Report: Review of the engagement of NGOs with the humanitarian reform process. The report outlines the current 'state of play' of NGO participation in humanitarian reform on the ground and makes recommendations for improving the implementation of humanitarian reform in relation to leadership, financing, accountability and coordination. Its findings are based on information gathered from five mapping studies the Project commissioned in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Sudan and Zimbabwe.

2009 marks the third year of IRC-UK's and the Ditchley Foundation's partnership in producing high-quality conferences on pressing issues in the humanitarian and development sectors. IRC-UK would like to thank Sir Jeremy Greenstock and the Ditchley Foundation for their continued support.

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Cover photograph: Woman collects water. The Hassa Hissa Camp for internally displaced persons, outside Zalingei in Sudan's violence-torn Darfur region. © Paul Jeffrey/CAFOD. Photograph p6: Boys starting a fire. © CARE/Nicky Lewin.

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Part 1

Keynote speeches and presentations

Sarah Hughes, Executive Director, IRC-UK

NGO perspectives on humanitarian reform: the synthesis report

Sarah Hughes's remarks placed humanitarian reform within its historical context, namely the unprecedented display of will shown by a variety of stakeholders in 2005 to make the humanitarian system more relevant, responsive and reactive to humanitarian needs. She noted that meeting the specific challenges of operational capacity, systematic planning, predictable funding and sectoral coordination were always going to be complex tasks. The main flaw in the reform process, which has become clearer in hindsight, was focusing on the top-down nature of international humanitarian response. This resulted in the reforms being overly technical and procedural in scope, and thus neglecting operational realities on the ground, including accountability to affected populations, NGO partnership and involvement of national and local actors. Three issues were highlighted:

- Leadership, and the need for strong, independent Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) with the requisite humanitarian experience to champion humanitarian needs and see through the successful implementations of other reforms, including the cluster approach and pooled funds.
- The rapid progress made on financing, with the creation of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the application of new pooled funds such as the Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF) and the expansion of the Emergency and Humanitarian Response Funds (E/HRF), although there are doubts whether allocations are benefiting local and national NGOs as much as they could. There are serious concerns over the mix and application of pooled funds in practice, which in many cases depends on effective humanitarian leadership. The humanitarian impact of these financing mechanisms are hard to measure, and disbursement often gets tangled in problematic dynamics within coordination clusters and cluster lead agencies, as was seen recently in Pakistan.
- Partnership and accountability to affected populations is pivotal, and donors, the UN and NGOs need to revisit

their commitment to international standards such as SPHERE and the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP). In a context of rapidly deteriorating security and diminishing humanitarian space, it is even more essential that the Principles of Partnership (endorsed by the Global Humanitarian Platform in 2007) guide the way by which all actors work together.

A common goal is shared by humanitarian actors, which is to improve the delivery of humanitarian assistance to those most in need.

Sarah Hughes concluded by expressing her hope that the day's discussion would further inform the work of the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project, which has a real opportunity to improve and strengthen the future course of humanitarian response.

Phil Marker, Head of the Conflict, Humanitarian and Security Department, DFID

Partnership in humanitarian action

Phil Marker recognised that the interest generated by the Ditchley conference clearly indicates the humanitarian community's commitment to strengthening partnerships for more effective responses. DFID fully supports a reformed humanitarian system that is led by the UN, although it recognises that NGOs are at the forefront of most humanitarian responses, and that their effectiveness depends in large part on the level of coordination, collaboration and partnership offered by different humanitarian actors on the ground. There are several markers of progress in improving partnership over the last few years, including:

- the establishment of the Global Humanitarian Platform's Principles of Partnership;
- OCHA's contribution in putting partnership on the agenda;
- the work of several UN agencies (UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF) toward improving UN-NGO financial arrangements; and,
- the work of individual donor agencies to improve their financial partnership engagement with NGOs.

Although there are a number of challenges to improving partnership, a common goal is shared by humanitarian actors, which is to improve the delivery of humanitarian assistance to those most in need. The NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project, with its ability to gather information from the field, learn lessons and translate this into practical improvements, is a step in the right direction. Through meeting regularly with NGOs on current crises and humanitarian issues, DFID hopes to continue strengthening its partnerships.

Sir John Holmes, Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, United Nations

Progress on humanitarian reform: changing organisational culture to embrace partnership

John Holmes was unable to attend the conference due to the recent earthquake in Sumatra and floods in the Philippines. Holmes's speech 'Progress on Humanitarian Reform: changing organisational culture to embrace partnership' was delivered by Mark Cutts, senior humanitarian officer at UN OCHA.

Holmes outlined 'mega-trends' which will drive up humanitarian needs and create chronic vulnerability on an unimaginable scale. The UN agencies, countries, NGOs, the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement and other actors have all recognised the need to work together to strengthen the humanitarian architecture.

Partnership, he stated, means focusing on the needs of the most vulnerable rather than individual organisations or mandates. Humanitarians must change their behaviour to truly work in the spirit of the Principles of Partnership. For example, humanitarian and development actors need to stop working in separate silos. To encourage cooperation he proposed some practical measures, including:

- taking cluster leadership more seriously;
- fully separating cluster leadership from individual agency activities;
- ensuring NGOs and civil society organisations have the resources to participate in coordination mechanisms;
- providing organisations with incentives to improve partnership at the field level;

- improving transparency of funding mechanisms; and,
- reducing damaging competition between humanitarian actors.

Humanitarian actors, increasingly at risk of attack, must take the following steps:

- communicate better the validity of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence;
- establish better acceptance and consent by state and non-state actors;
- strive for the right balance between operations and advocacy, which will inevitably vary depending on the context;
- build up the capacity of national staff and the creation of strong, independent local NGO partners, which requires more capacity building and less 'international fire brigade' activities; and,
- broaden the donor base to share responsibilities and costs.

Lydia Geirsdottir, Humanitarian Reform Officer for the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project in Afghanistan

Grounding humanitarian reform in field realities: a case study from Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, humanitarian reform has a long way to go before proving its value to the beneficiaries it is intended to serve. While Lydia Geirsdottir recognised that bigger issues loom such as the credibility of the humanitarian enterprise as a whole and addressing the needs of civilians caught in the conflict, humanitarian reform initiatives remain instrumental to the response strategy.

In an ideal version of reformed humanitarian response, strong humanitarian leadership should ensure that access to populations in need is negotiated with all parties to the conflict, military actors are held accountable to International Humanitarian Law and the Afghan Civil/Military guidelines, and adequate funding is distributed based on needs identified by the operational humanitarian community within functioning cluster coordination systems. It may be too early to judge the performance of various aspects of the reform, as the clusters were rolled out little over a year ago and reformed funding has of yet had little if any impact.

Humanitarian leadership needs further work. Taking advantage of specific HC strengthening efforts is essential if the HC is to facilitate and ensure the advocacy, coordination, representation and resource mobilisation of the humanitarian community in-country, and to hold the clusters, donors and humanitarian community to account on behalf of beneficiaries.

The current system of multi-hatting is not facilitating the necessary framework for an efficient functioning of the HC. In Afghanistan the HC has a quadruple position (Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG), Resident Coordinator (RC), Resident Representative (RR) of UNDP, and HC) in a highly politicised and conflict-related context where neutral humanitarian leadership is absolutely critical. Efforts of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) to strengthen the HC system are seen as promising.

'Mega-trends' are expected to drive up humanitarian needs and create chronic vulnerability on an unimaginable scale.

The NGO community needs to take greater responsibility for the effective functioning of the humanitarian system, which involves actively participating in clusters and embracing true partnership. One of the main challenges to NGO participation in the cluster system in Afghanistan is NGOs' lack of time and human resources to function as full partners, leaving the UN to bear most of the burden. Ensuring Afghan NGO inclusion in the system is a challenge that must be met, as many are unaware of multiple coordination structures and available funding. Improving communication between coordination structures in Kabul and in the field should improve responses. There is a commitment on behalf of all actors to improve the system, and the work that the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project has initiated to ensure Afghan NGO inclusion will hopefully lead to more dynamic and interactive coordination.

Manisha Thomas, Policy Officer, ICVA

Bridging the leadership gap: effective humanitarian coordination in practice

Manisha Thomas focused her remarks on the need to rethink how we view leadership. The UN approach to leadership is quite hierarchical and top-down, but what we need is more facilitating and supportive leadership. Leadership should not be about being in positions of power or being in the spotlight, but instead helping to make the delivery of aid more effective and accountable to populations.

While Humanitarian Coordinators are the most easy target when talking about leadership (because they are so visible), she pointed to the leadership role that also needs to be played by cluster coordinators, OCHA (particularly in terms of inter-cluster

coordination), NGOs (both national and international), and donors. The terms of reference for an HC outlines a long list of expectations, but there is a need to be realistic about what one person can do when they have numerous jobs, including RC, DSRSG, Designated Official and even Resident Representative of UNDP at times. The mix of HCs and RCs remains problematic in many situations and the result is that HCs are very much stuck in UNDP's system. If HCs are to carry out their jobs, they also need to have adequate back-up and support from OCHA, in addition to having qualified people in the position. This support is especially important when a situation arises in which the HC has to stand up to governments. That support also has to come from headquarters – OCHA New York in many cases, but also from the Secretary-General in some.

The silo approach amongst clusters is still evident. OCHA's role should be to ensure good inter-cluster coordination and a strategic approach throughout response, including in Humanitarian Country Teams, for example. The issue of cluster leadership is also important. The attitude of cluster coordinators is essential: while they need to have technical expertise, they also need to know how to work in an inclusive, partnership-oriented manner. NGOs operating as cluster co-leads/co-chairs/co-facilitators can result in improved accountability and improve the accountability of the HC. NGOs – both international and national – also need to take a stronger role in terms of leadership and coordination and hopefully the project and NGO coordination bodies can contribute to improving our role. Competition between UN agencies and NGOs does exist, and donors play a role in fuelling competition when funding is involved. Donors also need to take a greater role in leadership to facilitate improved humanitarian response.

Janet Lim, Assistant High Commissioner for Operations, UNHCR

The weak link: strengthening partnership for better humanitarian response

The weak link of partnership is relations between international organisations and their national and local counterparts, especially as national and local organisations are sometimes the only means to deliver protection and other forms of assistance to displaced persons in the type of environments we face today, which are increasingly characterised by confusion between civilian and military activities and increasing restrictions on humanitarian space. These organisations have been able to develop a modus operandi for accessing hard-to-reach places such as Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq and Pakistan. The humanitarian community needs to identify means within the humanitarian reform agenda that can make partnership more predictable, coherent and better supported.

Lim acknowledged the Synthesis Report's findings that humanitarian reform processes are often difficult for national

and local organisations to access. Participation in the cluster approach, for example, is taxing even for large organisations, and processes to access common humanitarian funds at the country level are challenging. To avoid international agencies inadvertently choking the potential of these organisations, a fundamental shift in partnership with local partners is necessary.

In order to achieve this work must be done on:

- simplifying procedures to remove barriers for smaller national organisations to, for example, participate in the clusters and access pooled funds;

- mitigating security risks for national partners;
- supporting local leadership development; and,
- supporting national capacity and ensuring effective local partner engagement, which should be central themes for 2010 for the work of such bodies as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the Global Humanitarian Platform, as well as the many sub-groups working on aspects of humanitarian reform such as leadership, clusters and financing.



Part 2

Discussion

Summary

Assurance was given that John Holmes, the UN's emergency relief coordinator, is committed to reform and that considerable progress has been made amongst UN agencies to embrace reform within their own mandates.

There must be caution not to focus too closely on achieving specific outcomes from the reform process, but rather to ask whether humanitarian reform is changing the system, and if these changes lead to improved services for affected populations. A participant commented that the Synthesis Report strikingly suggests that the UN-centred humanitarian reforms have not so far demonstrated improved responses to crises.

The recommendations from the Synthesis Report are not new, particularly those regarding accountability of the leadership at the field level, yet they do act as a reminder of where improvements are required at both the country and global levels. Is the lack of progress due to an unwillingness to change? In Afghanistan, for example, reform is on the agenda; however, the practicalities make it difficult to carry out. There needs to be acknowledgement that the reform processes function well in certain contexts but less so in others.

A query was raised as to how coordination can be improved when leadership is held at the international level whilst functionality is at the local level. What happens on the global cluster level, furthermore, is often not transparent.

Several participants brought up the fact that many partners on the ground haven't even heard of the reform process; however, what matters most is the actual impact of the reforms on responses.

Reform is meant to change institutions, but what functions on the ground often depends on individuals. Difference in personality, management style and experience were frequently mentioned as factors in the widely differing evaluation of HCs.

Below are some of the key issues that were discussed.

Humanitarian Leadership and Double-Hatting of HCs

Leadership was identified as a key issue across the board. Humanitarian Coordinators should have humanitarian background and expertise, and take an inclusive approach with regard to local, national and international NGOs in order

to build capacity. Leadership and coordination should take a bottom-up approach and affected communities should be asked whether they are getting the services and support they need. There was general agreement that donors and the international community need to collectively strengthen the Humanitarian Coordinator system – enhancing their accountability to the humanitarian community, providing better training and supporting the capacity of HCs to fulfil their functions. Such strong and effective leadership can contribute to ensuring that reform mechanisms operate as they should.

There was debate around the 'double-hatting' of the Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator roles. Some participants argued that greater leverage could be applied on governments when the different functions were combined. If the roles were separated, it was argued, they could end up in competition. One participant pointed out that if the UN insists that double and triple-hatting does not create conflict within one person, why was it considered likely that the separated roles would conflict with each other?

It was noted that there were instances when an RC/HC has development experience and therefore prioritises development work over humanitarian assistance. Again, strong humanitarian experience was suggested as being essential. Natural disasters and conflict situations present very different challenges to the RC/HC role; there could be merit in separating the two functions and analysing the result. One participant, however, argued that contradictions in function is a problem common to any job and simply requires prioritisation on a day-to-day basis. One advantage of multiple hats was the option of using whichever hat is most appropriate to the context. A question was raised whether the solution was for more leaders, or rather for different types of leaders, or both.

It was suggested that some governments don't like strong HCs and a question was raised whether donors, and the UN itself, are sufficiently vocal in support of HCs. The backing of HCs from headquarters level was described by one participant as 'infrequent'. It was also remarked that NGOs should be able to rely on HCs to fulfil a key in-country advocacy function, defending humanitarian principles and ensuring humanitarian access. It was questioned whether donors provide enough diplomatic support to help HCs fulfil their roles in the face of hostile governments who may reject strong HCs. Though

one participant countered that while advocacy is important, it is results that matter. Humanitarian assistance is ultimately measured by delivery to beneficiaries and life-saving impact; it is longer-term recovery or development programmes that rely on the support of national governments.

Inclusion of National Actors

There was a consensus that the inclusion of local and national NGOs in the delivery of humanitarian aid has had a positive effect on local beneficiaries, as local populations become engaged in projects on the ground as partners. Even though much discussion about building local capacity can be seen as 'all talk and no action' there have been positive developments in the field. The aim is to build local and national capacity before a crisis hits; one participant noted this requires NGOs to organise themselves better. Care must also be taken to reduce negative competition between national and international NGOs.

Local and national NGOs seek equality and mutual respect in implementing projects and should be invited to international debates in order to promote funding and capacity enhancement. This would help inform donor strategies considerably. Where donors and multilaterals coordinate from the centre, it becomes very difficult to assess whether local strategies and UN Country Humanitarian Teams are working to the same ends. Ensuring that the humanitarian reform system is better equipped to address these information gaps means drawing on the widest possible engagement of national actors and civil society. Furthermore, partnership should be a 'two-way street' in which local and national partners are able to contribute at the strategy level rather than only delivering projects. In Darfur, for example, greater participation of local NGOs was needed; if funding had been accessible for small local NGOs it would have increased the benefit to local people.

In relation to diminishing humanitarian space, there is a tension in that emphasis is placed on building local NGO capacity but the host governments are often hostile to civil society. How international NGOs can better support fledgling independent NGOs remains an important challenge to address.

Enhancing local and national NGOs' knowledge to ensure that they are aware of the potential benefits of participation in the institutions and processes created by humanitarian reform is one of the main tasks of the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project. A distinction should be made between national NGOs that need capacity enhancement and those that do not, as many national NGOs have strong capacity and knowledge. One participant argued that nationality should not form the basis of judging which NGOs to partner with; instead funds should be tied to NGO governance.

Capacity-enhancement is needed before a crisis hits so different national and local actors can respond. This requires a certain predictability of funding and not switching funding on and off as emergencies arise. Capacity-enhancement, however, as one participant noted, is not something new for NGOs; it is already an integral part of NGO response on the ground. It should also

be taken into account that small national or local organisations are asked to fulfil a variety of different roles and that the international community needs to have realistic expectations of what small organisations can do.

Funding

Funding continues to be an issue for smaller NGOs, as the minimum cap for funding proposals is often too high for these NGOs to consider. In Sudan, for example, the minimum grant available from the Common Humanitarian Fund is \$200,000, which is too large for many smaller and national NGOs to consider. One participant pointed out, however, that pooled funding is not nor should be the only source of funding, and the NGOs do have a role in small project funding. What national NGOs need, as one participant argued, is not more capacity building but access to funds. This requires realigning the current pooled fund mechanisms to accommodate national NGOs. An example put forward was the micro-finance element to be included in the new ERF in Afghanistan.

On the NGO side there is an inherent tension in being part of a coordinated response and insisting on remaining independent, neutral actors.

There is often difficulty in disbursing cash in a quick, efficient manner from donors through to the recipient agency. It was again suggested that clusters should separate the roles of coordination and allocation of funds. The Synthesis Report suggests that UN agencies make contracting arrangements more transparent for partners and deliver funds more efficiently. Alternative management for pooled funding were suggested; for example, through IOM, UNOPS or even the private sector. One participant asked if the pressure on OCHA to speed up procedures within the CERF is having an impact.

Greater donor oversight and engagement with pooled funds is also an important means of measuring impact. As the Synthesis Report highlights, the ERFs/HRFs are an important part of the picture in many contexts and, managed well, can be a real asset. Yet it is only part of the picture. Donors must ensure that the impact of multilateral financing remains a paramount consideration, be careful not to risk jeopardising learning opportunities and remain engaged in decision-making bodies and maintain oversight over disbursement.

Coordination

It was noted that every context of coordination is unique and that the application of appropriate coordination mechanisms will differ in this respect. Yet it was agreed that good and effective coordination does rely in all cases on strong leadership. The cluster system was a topic that was returned to repeatedly. One participant noted that HCs at country level should ensure the effective implementation of the cluster approach as well as promote meaningful partnership in coordination mechanisms.

Another participant also stressed that the cluster as a whole needs to decide to work together to achieve a result; it must be about more than a meeting. Sri Lanka was pointed to as an example of a cluster mechanism working well with the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies operating in parallel with the UN system, a system that might work well in other contexts. Building local capacity was easier, it was argued, where cluster mechanisms were in place as this provided the means through which to channel funding. Above all, coordination should be implemented in ways that help to strengthen local capacity and local structures.

The WASH cluster was discussed in some detail as it is seen by many as an effective cluster that places a lot of emphasis on training and coordination. As it was given a blank canvas as a starting point, considerable attention was paid to understanding how the different agencies worked and how they could work within the cluster for it to be effective. This includes using clusters to work with governments as well as with NGOs. Joint chairing of clusters was raised as possibly leading to greater acceptance and impact on the ground. Having an NGO involved could even act as a balance to the HC. Expectations within clusters need to be made clearer and more formal mechanisms developed for the involvement of NGOs running clusters.

Above all, it was suggested that there needs to be greater recognition from donors and UN agencies that coordination is a specific skill that requires training, support and resources. Cluster leads at the country level need a composite understanding of how coordination plays out at the global level. This includes, for example, a thorough understanding of how the various humanitarian actors and stakeholders across the UN-NGO spectrum operate.

On the NGO side, it was noted, there is an inherent tension in being part of a coordinated response and insisting on remaining independent, neutral actors. One participant felt that NGOs should be capable of overcoming this tension of conflicting priorities, for example, when attending cluster meetings.

Partnership and Accountability

One participant expressed doubt that the concept of partnership could be sustained when lead agencies within a cluster occupy both a coordinating and funding role. Adding more layers of procedure, however, takes away resources from

front-line project delivery. Another issue of frustration that was aired was the issue of administrative fees, wherein the UN and INGOs are seen as retaining money for overheads but not granting the same allowance to local partners. Processes within the UN have been initiated to address these issues.

Many participants expressed the value of improving partnership rather than the 'different camps' approach. The UN can play a role with governments by clarifying the role of NGOs. In Cyclone Nargis, for example, it was the local community that did lifesaving first, as NGOs were prevented from entering the country. If local, national and international organisations work together based on their comparative advantages, there is much to gain.

A question was raised whether humanitarian agencies are truly trying to 'work themselves out of a job' or if it is in their self-interest to stay in-country as long as possible. On the one hand NGOs can choke the space for other actors, but on the other hand building and supporting civil society is healthy in any country and helps societies respond to emergencies, as was demonstrated in Myanmar. Often NGOs do not depart immediately following an emergency but rather stay on through the development phase and act as a shield for national NGOs to grow.

Accountability to beneficiaries remains a key area for improvement, and further work should be undertaken to combine best practices such as HAP and SPHERE into one unified system. Feedback systems should be put in place to enable beneficiaries and local NGOs to offer constructive recommendations.

Measuring Effectiveness

Impact was mentioned many times throughout the day. There are many initiatives dealing with measuring impact at the moment, such as OCHA, the Emergency Capacity Building Project, the Tufts University participatory impact studies, and of course the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project. Given the number of different initiatives, it was suggested that more coherent and collective approaches to assessing impact across sectors should be developed. The role of NGO governance was highlighted as a possible way to improve performance, impact, response and accountability through positive self-examination. It was also suggested that national NGOs could benefit from training on governance structures and the creation of national boards.

The Hyogo Framework for Action, which was launched around the same time as the UN reforms, was discussed as it has established linkages and structures for national disaster management. It was acknowledged that the framework works well in natural disasters and non-conflict zones, but that conflict situations present extra challenges. The national platforms that are coming together under Hyogo are proving successful in bringing together local actors. The international community can help encourage emergency preparedness within the system. It was noted that donor support was needed to help improve

preparedness and build capacity for national platforms to manage an international response to natural disasters.

Before coordinating responses, the humanitarian community needs to improve coordination of needs assessment, and then decide who can respond where, based on prioritised needs. This could increase buy-in across the board and resolve tensions; however, baseline data is often quite poor. Many donors would like to see better needs assessments based on joint methodology and better leadership of the humanitarian system. This requires clarifying the role of the OCHA office and providing more support for the HC.

Looking to the Future

Several participants raised the issue of new or non-traditional actors changing the landscape in which we operate. Emerging actors such as China, the Gulf States, new funding initiatives like the Gates and Clinton foundations, and new regional coordinating bodies such as ASEAN and SAARC could operate in parallel to the current system and make the current debates over humanitarian reform seem insignificant.

These new actors might have a different set of rules and standards from the traditional humanitarian values. More aid could be distributed from government to government. Over the next three to ten years we will have to adapt to these new realities. In the future, it is important that more disasters do not equal more of the same response, which is neither financially nor politically sustainable. The 'fire brigade' model needs to be adapted.

Another area that needs more analysis is the role of NGOs as cluster co-leads, as there is a lack of understanding of what the experience has been across the board, and whether it is an appropriate role. One alternative ventured was to hold cluster leads accountable by developing steering groups within clusters.

Humanitarians, it was argued, need to question the assumption that they are the solution to emergencies, and consider more seriously the role of governments, local civil society, the private sector and other actors.

There needs to be clarity around achievable goals within each country, which will vary between protracted conflict, crises and natural disasters. As baseline data is often poor, setting thresholds, such as through the CAP, can help. More consistent planning will ultimately lead to better outcomes. Contingency planning needs to be carried out, as well as planning for good eventualities like the return of IDPs.

At the conclusion of the conference it was noted that while there was not agreement on all of the issues discussed it was an excellent opportunity for open discussion and for generating ideas on how to improve partnership. While the means of improving partnership will continue to be discussed and debated among stakeholders, the goal of improving responses on the ground will hopefully continue to bring the various humanitarian actors around the table.

NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project

NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project

The NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project aims to strengthen the effective engagement of local, national and international humanitarian NGOs in reformed humanitarian financing and coordination mechanisms at global and country levels. By supporting NGOs to better understand the reforms and highlighting where barriers exist to successful implementation on the ground, the project will help improve international policies related to humanitarian reform and improve the delivery of humanitarian aid and accountability to crisis-affected people. The project, which is funded by DFID, runs until October 2011 and comprises a consortium of six NGOs – ActionAid, CAFOD, CARE, International Rescue Committee, Oxfam and Save the Children – together with the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA). There is a Project Manager, based in London, and Humanitarian Reform Officers (HROs) working in the four project focus countries: Afghanistan, DRC, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe. The HROs engage with the humanitarian reform process in-country and report on issues faced by NGOs. The project also generates field-based evidence, information and lessons learnt to increase donor governments and the UN knowledge of good practice for effective engagement of NGOs in humanitarian response.



The Synthesis Report

In July 2009 the project published mapping studies assessing the current state of global humanitarian reform efforts from an NGO perspective in five countries: Afghanistan, DRC, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and Sudan. Subsequently, a Synthesis Report was produced in October 2009: Review of the engagement of NGOs with the humanitarian reform process.

Project Findings and Key Issues

Leadership gaps: insufficiently experienced Humanitarian Coordinators and cluster coordinators within the UN system.

Inconsistent coordination: lack of clarity on the roles of NGO cluster co-leads or co-chairs and need for more effective NGO participation in the clusters, particularly national NGOs.

Downward accountability: clusters need to devote more attention to ensuring accountability to affected populations.

Humanitarian financing: limited local and national NGO access to country-based humanitarian pooled funds and slowness of disbursement to NGOs of ERF and HRF funding, lack of direct access to the CERF and lack of transparency of allocations.

Weak partnership: barriers which limit the involvement of NGOs in reform processes need to be more consistently addressed.

Following the Ditchley Conference and publication of the Synthesis Report in October 2009 the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project will publish a Next Steps Paper that will lay out its strategy for taking forward the recommendations made in the report and identify project priorities for 2010.

For further information contact annie.street@actionaid.org or visit the project website at: <http://www.icva.ch/ngosandhumanitarianreform.html>.

The NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project

A chance to influence the humanitarian system

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