

The NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project

A chance to influence the humanitarian system



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NEWSLETTER

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Introduction to the Project

The NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project aims to strengthen the effective engagement of local, national and international NGOs in reformed humanitarian financing and coordination mechanisms at global and country levels. The project, which is funded by DfID, seeks to fortify the voices of NGOs in influencing policy debates and field processes related to humanitarian reform, identify good practice and propose solutions so that humanitarian response can better meet the needs of affected populations.

A consortium of six NGOs are part of the project – ActionAid, CAFOD, CARE, International Rescue Committee, Oxfam and Save the Children, together with the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA). The project runs for three years until October 2011.

The project employs 6 staff: there are Humanitarian Reform Officers (HROs) in the four project focus countries of Afghanistan, Ethiopia, DRC, and Zimbabwe and an International Project Manager and a Finance and Administration Coordinator, both based in London. **See page 2 for a brief bio of each of the HROs and how to contact them.**

Since it started at the end of 2008, the project has commissioned mapping studies of 5 countries Afghanistan, Ethiopia, DRC, Sudan and Zimbabwe, and produced a synthesis report based on the findings from the country studies: *Review of the engagement of NGOs with the humanitarian reform process*. **See page 4 for a summary on the Synthesis Report.** Project and consortium member agency staff have presented findings from the studies and the work of the HROs to the Good Humanitarian Donors group, to Geneva-based humanitarian working groups, to donors bilaterally and cluster lead and global cluster meetings and to humanitarian financing working groups. At the country level the HROs are

working to improve coordination, identify best practice and provide information and training to NGOs, particularly national NGOs.

Visit the project website for a wide range of project related information and documents

<http://www.icva.ch/ngosandhumanitarianreform.html>



Photo: CARE

ERF in Afghanistan

The HRO in Afghanistan, Lydia Geirsdottir, was invited to participate in the steering group drawing up the terms of reference for the new ERF. She placed a particular emphasis on ensuring that the fund would be available for national NGOs, and that thresholds for projects would not be so high as to exclude smaller but highly effective NGOs working in humanitarian response. The final agreement was that the fund would have a budget line specifically for micro-projects with an upper limit to \$25,000.

Get to know the Project Humanitarian Reform Officers

Lydia Geirsdottir, Kabul, Afghanistan

Lydia holds a Masters degree in Development and International Cooperation from the University of Gothenburg. Throughout her career she has gained extensive experience working with NGOs in the field including serving as Acting Executive Coordinator with the NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq (NCCI) from August 2004 to March 2005, where she was responsible for coordinating, advocating and representing about 120 member and observer INGOs working with the UN, donors, embassies, the national government and various third parties. She is fluent in English, Swedish, Icelandic and has communicative knowledge of German and Spanish. She is a dual national of Sweden and Iceland. Lydia joined the project on 3rd June 2009 and is based in CARE Kabul.

Contact Lydia via email: lydia.geirsdottir@af.care.org



"Afghanistan is one of the world's worst humanitarian situations with severe humanitarian indicators in every sector. After the fall of the Taliban in 2001 the world defined Afghanistan as a post-conflict developmental context and the levels of humanitarian assistance were drastically reduced, the focus shifting to long-term development initiatives and governance support. Seeing the desperate needs, the NGO community started an advocacy campaign

in 2007/8 to get the humanitarian needs back on the agenda; for the establishment of an independent humanitarian coordination system and for increased humanitarian funding. Their efforts were successful and the cluster system was rolled out in 2008 and OCHA was re-opened in the country in January 2009. The project is already working in Afghanistan to ensure accountable and predictable humanitarian programming and that the humanitarian community takes on the challenge of establishing a structure which will facilitate increased and better support to the population in need"

Liliane Bitong Ambassa, Kinshasa, DRC

Liliane joined the project with extensive knowledge of NGO field coordination. She holds a Masters degree in Humanitarian Assistance with a specialisation in Laws of Armed Conflicts. from Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, the Netherlands and Ruhr Universitat Bochum, Germany. She is currently conducting a research on the impact of German humanitarian intervention in East DRC, towards a PhD at University of Treves, Germany. She has experience of working with GTZ in DRC and Sierra Leone. She has also worked with IRIN and ICRC - Geneva. She is a national of Cameroon and is fluent in French and English, has good knowledge of German and fair knowledge of Dutch. Liliane commenced her duties on 3rd June 2009 and is based in Oxfam, Kinshasa

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"DRC is at a crossroads. While one of the worst humanitarian crises is still unfolding in eastern parts of the country, with over two million displaced and a flurry of armed groups and ongoing military operations still causing immense hardship for the civilian population, the majority of the country is experiencing peace and the Congolese authorities are increasingly seeking to exert greater ownership over the humanitarian and development

response. In this changing environment, humanitarian actors and national authorities need to learn to work better together. Building on the country's five

years of implementation of humanitarian reform, which saw DRC pilot the cluster approach and the Common Humanitarian Fund in 2006, the project is working in close collaboration with humanitarian and local stakeholders in order to improve partnerships between local and international actors.."

Mudasser Hussain Siddiqui, Harare, Zimbabwe

Mudasser holds an MA in Social Work, Medical and Psychiatric Social Work from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India. Mudasser comes to the project with 4 years experience in ActionAid Afghanistan, where his last position was Manager of the Policy Advocacy and Research team. He has written a number of papers including a study on Food Security Situation in Afghanistan (2005) and Status of pro-poor governance in Afghanistan (2006). He is a national of India and speaks excellent Urdu, English and Hindi and has basic knowledge of Dari. Mudasser commenced his functions on 25 August 2009 and is stationed in Save the Children UK, Harare.

Contact Mudasser via email: mudassers@savethechildrenzw.org

"The humanitarian reform process was initiated in Zimbabwe with cluster roll out in 2007. The progress of humanitarian reform has been patchy with issues of humanitarian leadership, funding and application of PoPs being the areas of concern. NGO advocacy for upholding their interests in humanitarian reform has been largely left on a small group of heads of agencies with limited resources to focus on the issue. The presence of an HRO in Zimbabwe provides an opportunity to the NGO community to make a concerted effort to advocate for strong humanitarian leadership, transparency and accountability in humanitarian funding and implementation of the whole reform process according to the POPs. The HRO is liaising with all stakeholders, raise issues of concern, provide training and advice to NGOs & promote accountability to the right holders. "



Dan Tyler, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Dan holds an MSc in Democracy and Democratisation from University College London and has extensive experience in humanitarian policy advocacy. Before he joined the project as HRO in Ethiopia, Dan served as Policy and Advocacy Adviser in the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in London and was a Steering Group member of the NGO and Humanitarian Reform project. Prior to IRC, he served as Advocacy and Policy Officer in Saferworld, London and also held Researcher positions at the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion in London as well as the House of Lords. In addition to his native English language skills, he also speaks Japanese and has basic knowledge of French. He is a British national. He took up his position as HRO in October 2009 and is based in Save the Children UK, Addis Ababa.

Contact Dan via email : Dan.T@scuk.org.et



"Large humanitarian challenges still face Ethiopia. Ongoing food insecurity, droughts and internal and external conflicts frequently trigger humanitarian needs and donors struggle to link effectively relief and development programmes, in line with their commitments under the Principles and Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD). The project in Ethiopia is working to strengthen partnership between international and Ethiopian humanitarian NGOs, with the HRO collaborating closely with UN OCHA to develop trainings on the reform process and exploring the means through which local NGOs can better participate in humanitarian coordination

and financing mechanisms. The HRO is also supporting the efforts of NGOs in Ethiopia to close partnership gaps with UN, Government of Ethiopia and donors by researching and documenting areas of weak practice and proposing solutions which will strengthen the humanitarian system overall."

The Pakistan Emergency

Benedict Dempsey, Save the Children UK

The humanitarian response to the displacement of over two million people in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province, in early May 2009, highlighted some particular ongoing problems with the humanitarian financing system.

To start with the overall donor response was inadequate. Donors failed to pledge sufficient funds in the crucial early phase of the emergency and by June 11th, over a month after the escalation in conflict began, the UN appeal was still only 25% funded.

"By late July, while over 40% of UN projects had received funding, fewer than 5% of non-UN projects had."

Just as worrying, though, was that the mechanisms through which funds were disbursed proved to be dysfunctional. In the absence of a pooled fund in Pakistan, many donors chose to allocate large sums to individual UN agencies, to be disbursed using the cluster system. This was a mistake.



Outside view of the tents at the Chota Lahore Camp, June 2009 – Photo: ActionAid

The use of UN agencies as proxy pooled funds slowed the allocation of money to implementing agencies, most of whom were NGOs. By late July, while over 40% of UN projects had received funding, fewer than 5% of non-UN projects had. Added to this was a lack of

transparency from UN agencies, making it difficult to know where the funds were ultimately being spent.

The disbursement of funds through UN agencies also had a negative effect on the clusters themselves. Cluster co-ordinators were already struggling with their co-ordination roles while simultaneously representing their own agencies in the clusters. Requiring clusters to disburse funding increased the perceived conflict of interest of co-ordinators. The inter-cluster diagnostic mission to Pakistan in July concluded that financial disbursement through a cluster contaminates the objective ethos of a co-ordinating body and causes delays in disbursement. For the affected communities, the funding delays had serious consequences. For several weeks Save the Children was unable to implement mobile health and nutrition clinics that would have reached 2400 people per day with potentially life-saving services. Emergency education for 10,000 children was also delayed.

"The inter-cluster diagnostic mission to Pakistan in July concluded that financial disbursement through a cluster contaminates the objective ethos of a co-ordinating body and causes delays in disbursement."

The Pakistan experience highlighted several areas where humanitarian financing needs improvement. Firstly, donors need to maintain flexibility of funding. Especially when there is no established pooled fund donors should implement bilateral funding to NGOs as necessary, rather than entrusting all their funds to UN agencies.

Secondly, the role of cluster co-ordinator should remain separate from the operational activities of cluster agencies. Only then might clusters be viewed as an impartial mechanism for ear-marking funds. Finally, donors should require greater transparency for the onward disbursement of funds. Unless donors insist on full transparency it will remain difficult to be sure the funds are reaching beneficiaries as intended.

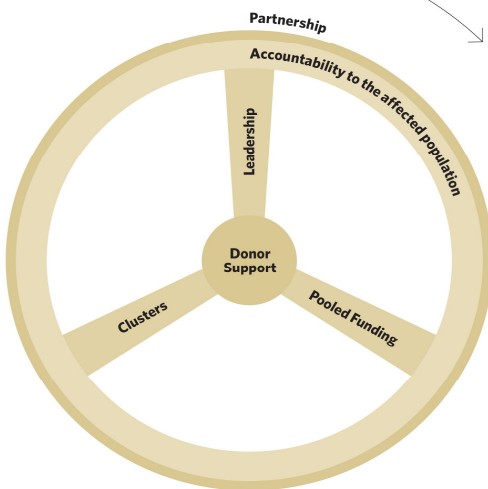
Synthesis Report : Review of the engagement of NGOs with the humanitarian reform process

In October 2009 the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project published the *Synthesis Report: review of the engagement of NGOs with the humanitarian reform process at the Ditchley Conference* (see www.icva.ch/ngosandhumanitarianreform for the Conference report). The report is based on the findings from 5 mapping studies carried out in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, DRC, Sudan and Zimbabwe between November 2008 and February 2009.

The report reconceptualised humanitarian reform as a chariot wheel where the three spokes of coordination, financing and leadership rest on the central hub of donor funding and are bound by the wheel rims of partnership and accountability to crisis affected populations. All these elements must work in tandem if humanitarian reform is to efficiently and effectively meet the needs of those in crisis.

The Chariot Wheel of Humanitarian Reform

Figure by John Cosgrave



The report identified that relative progress had been made on improving humanitarian funding, particularly with the introduction of the CERF and the more widespread application of other 'reformed' humanitarian financing elements the Common Humanitarian Funds (CHF), Emergency Response Funds (ERFs) and the Humanitarian Response Funds (HRFs), - although it identified continued problems with lack of transparency over the destination of these funds, and slow onward disbursement to NGOs which means some end recipients of CERF money do not receive funds from UN agencies for many weeks. Progress has also been made on coordination with the introduction of the cluster approach in 25 out of the 27 countries which had Humanitarian Coordinators (at the time of writing). Experience and attitudes towards the clusters varied by NGO, and whilst many have been positive about the benefits, and prepared to invest time and resources acting as cluster co-leads, others particularly smaller international NGOs and national and local NGOs have found the plethora of coordination meetings over burdensome.

The research found that 2 elements of the humanitarian reform agenda are still not working as they should: leadership and partnership.

Humanitarian leadership, and particularly the role of Humanitarian Coordinators is fundamental to all aspects of humanitarian reform as effective leaders can push the system forward, ensuring that

funding is allocated in a timely and coordinated fashion and gaps and bottlenecks are addressed, and that partnership ways of working are embedded in practice. Yet findings from the mapping studies showed that NGOs in only one country, DRC, felt the Humanitarian Coordinator had played an effective role in advocating for the humanitarian community and worked effectively to ensure that the various elements of the humanitarian reform agenda all worked in tandem. Leadership is also critical at the cluster level, where an effective cluster coordinator who understands partnership working can encourage relevant humanitarian actors to participate in coordination and play an effective and strategic role.



Photo: Kate Holt/Shoot The Earth/ActionAid 2008

Partnership remains the other big challenge for effective implementation of the humanitarian reform agenda. The nature of the humanitarian system means that partnership is fundamental to effective working, as actors must work together to ensure that needs are met in a timely fashion and gaps in response do not endanger the lives of people in crisis. The research found that too frequently staff in both international and national and local NGOs are only vaguely aware of the workings of humanitarian reform and many actors are not informed about the 5 Principles of Partnership: equality, transparency, result-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity that should underpin humanitarian action. Furthermore a considerable cultural shift is required to embed partnership working within UN agencies.

The report makes 15 recommendations to NGOs, the UN system and donors which if enacted would improve the effectiveness of the humanitarian system and contribute towards ensuring that humanitarian aid responds appropriately to the needs of crisis affected people.

Interview with Ross Mountain

By Liliane Bitong Ambassa

"There has been progress"

Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator Ross Mountain left his post in the Democratic Republic of Congo in November 2009 after five years in the job. The New Zealander, whose "strong humanitarian leadership" was praised in the Synthesis Report*, gave the Newsletter an interview a few days before leaving the country.

Asked about cluster co-facilitation, the Humanitarian Coordinator, who introduced the co-facilitation system in DRC in 2008, saw obvious advantages.

"It just seemed the natural thing to do. It hopefully, on the one hand gave the NGOs better stakes, while on the other it serves to keep the lead agencies on their toes". He was also open to the idea of NGO co-facilitators being supported financially to undertake the role.

"I like to believe that specialised agencies of the UN should be applying their technical capacity. Their mandate is not to execute programmes on behalf of their own agencies. I believe that the job of coordinating and providing their technical expertise should be as is written down, part of their responsibility as agencies." Mr Mountain, who joined the UN over 30 years ago, said. "My concern is whether we have to set up another mechanism, if we're going to end up paying coordinators of clusters. I want people to take their responsibilities on board and coordination is not an add-on. Coordination is about making the work more effective, and is not an end in itself".

He however acknowledged the fact that the DRC 2010 Humanitarian Action Plan included co-financing for cluster leads and co leads. "It still remains to be seen which donors are going to fund these costs".

Asked what he thought about the Synthesis Report recommendation that the UN should abandon the double-hatted Resident Coordinator/ Humanitarian Coordinator model as the norm to allow for strong humanitarian leadership, Ross Mountain replied the separation was no panacea and was unlikely to happen.

"Since the facts are what they are, one should try and benefit from the pluses and minimise the minuses". Mr Mountain, who also served as Deputy Special Representative of Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon in DRC, added "It would be a matter of seeing how you can make sure that you have people in the role who recognize their different functions and who will stand up for humanitarian space".

Mr Mountain further suggested it might be useful to use OCHA's roster or bring external people who have a humanitarian background into the process of becoming Resident Coordinators so they have the necessary experience and skills.



Photo: Boys starting a fire - CARE/Nicky Lewin

Asked which major challenge remained on the humanitarian reform front, he said he wanted to see more emphasis on impact.

"What I am concerned about is to get a little bit more confirmation of the impact we are having on the population in humanitarian situations. We have anecdotal stuff, we have an impression. I really do think the humanitarian community has done an outstanding job; we have not had epidemics; when there have been outbreaks they've been contained, people are not dying of starvation; and we have managed to do a little bit more on protection of civilians".

Looking back over his five years in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr Mountain, who took office in February 2005, recalled the challenges facing DRC but nevertheless reiterated his faith in the country.

"This country (...) has so many problems, so many challenges. Peace does not drop out of the sky; it has to be worked at."

He considers the country is going in the right direction.

"I do believe in the country. I have the luxury of looking back over a few years. I could say that there has been progress".

*See the full version of the Synthesis Report at www.icva.ch/ngsoandhumanitarianreform

Upcoming events:

Merlin Health Cluster Training on Effective NGO Participation in Humanitarian Coordination Mechanisms - Zimbabwe, end April/beginning May, date tbc.. Contact: vivienne.forsyth@merlin.org.uk

ICVA Code of Conduct/Humanitarian Principles Learning Event - Bangkok, late May/early June, date tbc. Contact information@icva.ch

Useful links:

Link to documents and publications related to humanitarian reform:

http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/54_7687.htm **Policy Brief: Humanitarian Financing**

<http://www.ircuk.org/about-irc-uk/papers-reports-accounts/reports-policy-papers/> IRC Policy Papers including **Humanitarian Reform: Position Paper**

<http://www.cafod.org.uk/policy-campaigns/conflict> CAFOD Conflict and peace-building papers including **Civil Society and Conflict**

<http://www.careinternational.org.uk/2990/emergencies/emergencies.html> Resource Centre on Emergencies

<http://www.actionaid.org/main.aspx?PageID=343> Policy and publications including **Enhancing UN-NGO humanitarian financing partnerships to contribute to effective humanitarian response**

http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/policy/conflict_disasters/missing-pieces-humanitarian-pakistan.html Papers and reports on humanitarian conflict and disasters including **Missing pieces? Assessing the impact of humanitarian reform in Pakistan**

www.icva.ch Extensive archives on humanitarian reform, current and past emergencies and wider humanitarian issues. The Project webpage is managed by ICVA (www.icva.ch/ngosandhumanitarianreform)

www.oneresponse.info A website developed by OCHA (replaces www.humanitarianreform.org, www.humanitarianinfo.org, and ochaonline.un.org/fieldoffice)