

“Workshop on humanitarian Quality & Accountability in Afghanistan, lessons learned and challenges ahead.”

Date: March, 12th, 2008, 9 am – 4.30 pm

Venue:

Over the past few years, the political strategy of the International Community has focused on rebuilding the Afghan state through efforts to restore the authority of central government and the reconstruction of facilities. A lot has been done by local authorities, Afghan NGOs, International actors, the UN, donors, etc. They have rebuilt schools, organized health facilities, increased food security in remote areas and worked in unstable and difficult contexts with logistical and access constraints.

Having initially focused on quantitative aspects, with the imperative of geographical coverage of needs, the current trend is to focus on quality issues. The quality of the aid delivered has been called into question many times and humanitarian aid stakeholders have been highly criticized. This move from a quantitative to a qualitative approach to service and product delivery is certainly one of the challenges that the Afghan state and its partners will have to face in the coming years.

This trend is very much in line with what has been going on in the international humanitarian sector where various initiatives have been working to enhance the quality and accountability of humanitarian aid for many years. The Q&A group, a group of 6 such initiatives, ALNAP, Coordination Sud, Groupe URD, HAP, People In Aid and the Sphere Project, have produced a shared vision on Quality and Accountability:

“Today many aid stakeholders agree on the fact that people affected by disasters have limited options and little power over their access to assistance and protection. Humanitarian organisations therefore have an ethical responsibility to respect the dignity of victims and to do their utmost to ensure that their assistance programmes are of the best possible quality.”

Humanitarian agencies should respond meaningfully to needs, take into consideration local capacities and constraints, and respect and involve crisis-affected people. Any response should avoid or mitigate negative impacts while fostering positive effects. Organisations have to manage and support their staff members well; they should evaluate and learn from experience, and use resources efficiently and transparently. Organisations should be able to demonstrate commitment to improving their performance through verification and reporting systems.”¹

However, field-born and community-based information, which is critical for good policy design, is still often missing or over-simplified to give a satisfactory portrayal of the diversity of contexts. When it does exist, it is often overlooked due to time pressure and insufficient relevant resources (qualifications, financial). Monitoring of activities is still focusing on the activities being carried out rather than on the results of these activities. Evaluations of projects and participation are still too rare to sustain the lesson-learning process and the related improvement of practices. How can quality be improved? What methods are available and how can quality approaches be institutionalised so that practices really change in Afghanistan?

Improving the quality of humanitarian services should be seen as a shared responsibility, which also depends on the involvement and practices of donors. In Afghanistan the political agenda of donors is sometimes more important than the technical ones. The lack of coherence and coordination between the strategies of different donors in Afghanistan has been brought up many times. Aid stakeholders have had to change their practices in the field to fulfil

¹ Shared vision on Quality and Accountability, august 2007, Q&A group. For more information, see <http://www.compasqualite.org/blog/spip.php?article4>

donors' requirements even if these changes have had certain negative effects on the quality of projects. Many of them regret the lack of flexibility of most donors. If it is therefore clear that funding agencies can be responsible for the quality of humanitarian aid in a number of ways, how is this controlled, reinforced and monitored?

Today, the Afghan state is still troubled by inter community rivalries, narco-terrorism, the power in some regions of local war lords and anti-governmental forces and permanent insecurity. Insurgents have intensified their fighting in the south and bomb attacks throughout the country.

The conference on quality organised by Groupe URD and CWS in partnership with the GoA and HAP has three main objectives:

- To generate interest in quality and accountability in humanitarian interventions in Afghanistan (why is it important, why is it difficult?)
- To think about and eventually come up with a shared definition of "quality" in the Afghan context
- To generate dialogue between donor agencies, the UN, international organizations, national organizations on quality and accountability in humanitarian interventions in Afghanistan and address more particularly how donors can influence the quality of aid.

Agenda

MORNING

9- 9.30: Introduction and welcome – Groupe URD

9.30 – 10.00: Quality issues in the Afghan context (why is it important? Why is it difficult?) – Groupe URD

10.00: Tea break

10.15-11.20: Presentations from 2 donors representative, and one from the GoA representative on their vision of the quality issue in Afghanistan

11.20 – 12.30: Presentations from 3 members of the Q&A initiative (HAP, Groupe URD, Sphere) on the existing tools to improve the quality of aid delivery and accountability to beneficiaries/aid recipients.

12.30 – 1.30pm: Lunch

AFTERNOON

In partnership with:



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Though the poor quality of aid alone cannot explain the difficulties of the international strategy for reconstruction and peace enforcement in Afghanistan, the link between aid quality and stability remains of real significance.

To share experiences and thoughts about current quality issues in Afghanistan, Groupe URD and CWS in partnership with the GoA, HAP and Sphere invite practitioners and decision-makers to a seminar on *"Quality & Accountability in Afghanistan, lessons learned and challenges ahead."*

1.30 pm – 2.45 pm: Group exercises

• **Group 1:** What are the current initiatives in Afghanistan to improve the quality of aid? Sharing experiences.

• **Group 2:** How could we define the quality of aid in Afghanistan taking into account different points of view, from beneficiaries to state actors?

• **Group 3:** How can donors influence the quality of aid and level accountability to aid recipients/beneficiaries? What needs to be improved? How? Propositions?

2.45 pm – 3 pm: Tea break

3 pm- 4 pm: Plenary session: Presentations of the conclusions of the 3 groups – definition of the next steps

4 pm – 4.30 pm: Closing remarks

