Editorial

* Special issue *
THE QUALITY OF AID

Véronique de Geoffroy

The issue of quality is back on the international aid agenda with the launch of the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), the ideas and proposals from the SCHR’s certification project and the preparatory work for the World Humanitarian Summit, notably on aid effectiveness.

Groupe URD has taken an active interest in these initiatives, in keeping with our work in this area over the last 15 years to help improve aid practices. We have facilitated multi-actor debates and discussions and have been involved in the development of the CHS and its related tools. Given all this effervescence, we felt it would be a good idea to do this special issue of Humanitarian Aid on the Move. It explores different aspects of quality in aid through a series of articles by humanitarians, donors, journalists and researchers. The different points of view expressed show the complexity of the subject, which is not restricted to technical questions, but also raises political, organizational and ethical issues. This diversity also suggests that there is still much to do in this domain...

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Humanitarian aid now has its quality standard: progress and issues at stake for field actors

Magali Mourlon

After two years of development and numerous consultations, the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) was officially launched in Copenhagen in December 2014. Does it bring anything new to the humanitarian sector? Will this Standard help to promote the NGO certification project? What issues are at stake for NGOs in terms of implementing this norm?

Much has been written in recent years about improving the quality of humanitarian aid, and this continues to cause heated debates in our sector. There has been a significant increase in humanitarian needs and this has put greater pressure on the sector. On the one hand, donors are demanding greater effectiveness, and on the other, beneficiaries and local authorities in the field are rightly asking to be placed at the centre of the system and to be involved in the decision making process for aid allocation. The concept of quality, which is closely related to issues of accountability, transparency and efficiency, is fundamental to cope with these increasing needs in increasingly complex situations.

But what exactly are we talking about? Is there at least some agreement between beneficiaries, humanitarian workers, governments, donors and researchers about what quality means in relation to humanitarian aid? One of the main conclusions of Groupe URD’s last Autumn School on Humanitarian Aid was that the sector is unable to establish a single response to this question. How can progress be made if the community as a whole is not talking about the same thing?

At the launch of the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) in Copenhagen, everyone (or at least all the representatives at the conference) seemed to agree about the nine commitments included in the Standard. The document was developed via numerous consultations with organizations from the sector. It is a return to a single standard, as some organizations had requested. It is true that in the last ten or fifteen years there have been more and more Quality and Accountability initiatives; initially with the Sphere manual, then the Quality COMPAS, HAP International and its certification system, the Good Enough Guide, the ideas of People in Aid for better management of Human Resources, etc. All these tools developed by the sector met different demands, but some actors and NGOs had difficulty juggling between them. There had also been pressure from donors for whom funding the development of so many initiatives was becoming too expensive...

The CHS comes in a single document, a short booklet of around twenty pages, based on nine fundamental principles. Will this tool be enough for the sector to improve its response to crisis situations?

But first of all, let us go back to the question of what quality means (or does not mean) in terms of humanitarian aid.

The Larousse dictionary defines quality as “The characteristics and properties which contribute to making something correspond (or not) to its nature, and what we expect it to be. (…) That which makes something better than average”. We can see from this that quality implies the idea of something “better than average”, and which satisfies demands.

As such, it is obvious that quality is difficult to define in the humanitarian sector. Indeed, by what means, and on what basis could quality be measured? The situation before the crisis? Is there universal data which could justify minimum standards which are valid for every response?

When we talk about meeting demands, what demands are we talking about? For humanitarian actors and NGOs in particular, demands can come from two or even three sources. There are the demands of the beneficiaries - the affected population - who are effectively our “clients”. But there are also those of host governments, local authorities and the other actors involved in the coordination of humanitarian aid. These bodies see needs and the humanitarian response from another angle, which is often complementary, but sometimes contradictory… Finally, there is the view of funding agencies, donors and all those who make the response possible: our fellow citizens, our governments or our institutions – here again, their demands can vary. Some donors are very enthusiastic about the general adoption of the CHS (this is the case for example of DANIDA who already requires its partner NGOs to be certified on the basis of the CHS; but others, like DG ECHO, appear to be interested in the debate and the issue of quality in general, without asking the organizations that they fund to subscribe to one or other initiative. They already have numerous criteria for selecting (or pre-selecting) partners which, in their view, guarantee quality (this is
the case for Framework Partnership Agreements where ECHO asks its partners about their adherence to the Sphere standards). However, it is obvious that being able to show evidence of further commitment to quality in a funding request is looked upon positively by donors.

So, how can these different points of view be reconciled? Does the CHS provide any answers?

According to the CHS, quality is defined by a number of commitments vis-à-vis communities and people affected by a crisis which state what they can expect from organizations and individuals who deliver humanitarian aid. Thus, communities are at the centre of the CHS’s rationale for improving the quality of humanitarian aid.

The major innovation brought by this standard is that it tries to reconcile two approaches which, until now, had been unconnected. On the one hand, the sector has tried to improve the service it provides by focusing on the quality of its results (by following the classic approach to project management); on the other hand, certain initiatives focused on the organization, its processes and internal functioning, which is an approach similar to other standards adopted in the private sector (such as the ISO standard).

For each quality criterion, the CHS proposes key actions which are applied in the field and organisational responsibilities which are defined as prerequisites of humanitarian action.

Whether they are local or international, humanitarian organisations are subject to a large number of constraints, including administrative constraints, because donors, local governments and the United Nations have imposed an increasing number of procedures and rules. In addition, the number of obligatory audits has gone up continuously with a view to increasing transparency, effectiveness, coordination and relevance. And finally, funding application forms have become more complex, increasing the administrative load on organizations to such an extent that it creates a form of internal bureaucracy. Can all this really contribute to improving the quality of humanitarian aid? Will the CHS create additional constraints for organizations and their staff or will it, on the contrary, lead to simplification and alignment with the system in place? VOICE’s experience in facilitating the FPA Watch Group\(^3\) shows the difficulties that can emerge when trying to simplify the administrative prerequisites of a donor vis-à-vis its partners. Since the adoption of the first Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) in 1993, four new FPAs have been negotiated between ECHO and its partners (1999, 2004, 2008 and 2013). For each of these, the FPA Watch Group tried to simplify ECHO’s demands, but external constraints and pressure often proved to be too great. The inclusion of the logical framework, of a results-based approach, of the notion of “value for money” and the demand for greater transparency on purchasing procedures and the appointment of human resources added as many questions in funding application forms and extra annexes to be supplied up to the final report. The FPA Watch Group therefore endeavours to jointly develop guidelines for the implementation of the FPA because, no matter what the standard, it has little value if it remains purely voluntary and it is fundamental that the different parties agree about its interpretation and that they are therefore able to check whether its application is in keeping with the initial commitment.

Another question without an answer for the time being is that of certification. Indeed, a number of large NGOs want to use the CHS as a certification tool. As with the ISO standard, the idea would be to put the CHS in place within the organisation and ask an external and independent body to conduct an audit which would certify that the organisation complied with the standard. Consequently, there are numerous potential risks: over and above the cost that this implies, would certification of this kind not be in contradiction with the initial idea of developing the CHS? Is it possible to certify an organisation when we know that each project is implemented differently in order to adapt to different...
contexts? If certification is used to distinguish organizations from each other, is there not a risk that the CHS will lose its essence and become a tool for sanctioning rather than a tool for learning and improvement?

In addition, needs are constantly growing and, unfortunately, there is a risk that this trend will continue in the years ahead. What is more, it is not likely that financial resources will increase proportionately. New organizations want to join the global effort, and others who are already present work in parallel with their own tools and objectives, which are seen as being too different by traditional actors. It would be preferable if any initiative which aimed to improve the quality of humanitarian aid included – rather than excluded – these actors, for the good of the affected population.

The futurist vision of beneficiary populations selecting the NGO or the actor who would provide them with assistance is based on the idea that competition between organizations contributes to improving the quality of aid. This appears both unrealistic and inappropriate for the aid sector. Rather than encouraging this kind of competition in the field, all efforts should be made to ensure the best possible coverage of needs, which, in all likelihood, will always be greater than the aid that is available.

Though some feel it is too obvious, the CHS could help to find a common language for all organizations, and, at the very least, ensure that assistance is more appropriate and in keeping with the needs of the affected population. In order to do this, it is crucial that the CHS and the humanitarian principles on which it is based should be promoted as widely as possible. The aim should be to convince a maximum number of humanitarian aid organizations, and particularly those who were not present in Copenhagen and those who were not very involved, if at all, in the consultation process.

This is related to another limit of the CHS: the humanitarian system can only improve as a whole if all the major actors work towards this goal. In Copenhagen there was a strong signal of support for the standard from OCHA, but no guarantee that the United Nations would integrate its commitments into its own functioning. If this were the case, all the goodwill and effort of the member organizations would gain very little visibility, even with regard to crisis-affected people, as the United Nations plays a significant role in the majority of responses.

VOICE will continue to share information, as we have always done, so that the CHS is more widely known. It is a plural network (with a variety of opinions, including about the CHS and its development) and it is not our role to give priority to one initiative over another, but one of our objectives is to contribute to the professionalization of NGOs. In order to do this, we will continue to promote the different approaches which are available to NGOs, and particularly we will make sure as much as possible that our members, and humanitarian NGOs in general, who provide more than half of the aid in the field, are always consulted in the development of such an initiative. We remain convinced that a diversity of NGOs and approaches is necessary and beneficial. We therefore feel that it is preferable that our members are able to choose whether or not to apply one quality approach rather than another (or their own...).

In conclusion, as was repeated in Copenhagen, a first important step has been taken with the launch of the CHS, but there is still a long way to go. It is necessary now to develop practical implementation tools, to reflect together about the interpretation of the standard in order to support the organizations and individuals who want to adopt it, and to communicate with affected communities about its existence so that this initiative really achieves its initial objective in terms of quality and accountability. And lastly, we will have to convince the United Nations to fall into line and to include this new context in their Transformative Agenda while, in parallel, conducting major dissemination work vis-à-vis all other actors who provide humanitarian assistance, including "non-traditional" actors, and affected populations in order to share the values and principles included in the CHS with the greatest number.

Magali Mourlon, VOICE Programme Coordinator
VOICE is a network of 84 European NGOs working in humanitarian aid. As the main interlocutor with the European Union on humanitarian issues, VOICE promotes the added value and specific characteristics of NGOs. The network contributes to the professionalisation of its members through information sharing and workshops, thanks to its strong links with different quality networks and initiatives.

2. EU Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department.
3. The FPA Watch Group represents partner NGOs of ECHO in a consultation process which has been established for a number of years. The group reviews, evaluates and consults partners on all aspects related to the FPA. It works towards a shared interpretation and coherent application of the FPA.
4. See, for example, the article by Sandrine Tiller of MSF : The painfully obvious Core Humanitarian Standards highlight a humanitarian system that's out of touch, at http://www.msf.org.uk/article/opinion-and-debate-the-painfully-obvious-core-humanitarian-standards-highlight-a
The humanitarian system is polymorphous, is made up of multiple organisations and is constantly evolving. Due to its high level of diversity, generic concepts like ‘quality’ resonate differently for different aid organizations. The issues at stake for this definition are also different depending on the organisation: is it a question of improving impact, effectiveness, efficiency...? In this complex context, there is a temptation to approach the concept of quality in a normative way. Standards are written, formalized, supposedly known by all and are sometimes even legally enforceable. Current discussions about certification are in keeping with the current trend towards the simplification and standardization of how aid quality is understood.

The last Autumn School on Humanitarian Aid brought together fifteen participants to address the ambitious topic of the quality of humanitarian operations. The two days of debates and discussions did not allow any consensus to emerge between the participants about the definition of a quality humanitarian operation or about the way that the sector should evolve to guarantee better quality humanitarian responses.

The participants were particularly split over two main topics: the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) and the NGO certification process. Though the CHS, which is not tackled here in detail, was launched in Copenhagen last December¹, the certification process is still being studied.

With regard to certification, during the Autumn School the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR)² presented the final results of the two-year project to review certification mechanisms which began in October 2012. It emerged that the link between certification and improved quality of humanitarian operations has not been firmly established³ and therefore no one can say with certitude that the certification of NGOs would have an impact (whether positive or negative) on the quality of humanitarian projects.

The potential link between certification and quality is extrapolated from research carried out in other sectors, notably the private business sector. Such an extrapolation is difficult to justify because it does not take into account one of the key characteristics of humanitarian operations: in contrast to the private sector where the person who receives the good or service is also the person who pays for it, in the humanitarian sector there is a three-way relationship between the donor, the organisation which provides the humanitarian service and the aid beneficiary. As the group who receive the humanitarian service are not the ones who pay for the service, the financial lever cannot be used by the aid beneficiaries. The notion of accountability to the beneficiaries of aid was developed because of this specific characteristic. It is one of the key factors of relevant, high quality aid which is in line with humanitarian principles.

The certification process is a control and guarantee mechanism which mainly functions between the humanitarian organisation and the donor. It is difficult to imagine a beneficiary of aid refusing an operation under the pretext that the implementing body is not certified or a right to certification which is legally enforceable by the beneficiaries.

The resources available for the implementation of humanitarian operations are also limited, which forces aid organizations to make difficult decisions in terms of priorities and targeting (both geographical and individual). The resources used to reinforce organizational capacity and train humanitarian actors are even more limited, which can easily be justified by the desire to make sure that the majority of resources are dedicated to humanitarian operations themselves. If we return to the parallel with certification mechanisms in the private sector, certification bodies need to be independent of the humanitarian sector for obvious reasons of conflicts of interest. The proposed NGO certification model therefore appears to suggest that humanitarian funds should be dedicated to training non-humanitarian organizations in a context where resources dedicated to the victims of disasters are limited.

In addition, the certification project represents a further selection tool for donors. The main donors, however, seem to want to keep their own selection, accreditation, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Putting certification in place, even partially, would therefore add to existing administrative constraints without lightening any of them.

The proposed certification mechanism only addresses NGOs and would not concern United Nations agencies, or cooperation agencies. It would not have any impact on organizations which claim to be part of the humanitarian sector but do not respect the fundamental
principles of neutrality and impartiality, and which have private funds to implement operations which are often contested and questionable. This further limits the potential impact of this certification model.

In this context, where there is no proof that certification has an impact on the quality of aid delivered to crisis-affected people, it is therefore difficult to support the certification project. This was the position of eight French humanitarian organizations in a letter of 10 December 2014 addressed to the different national, regional and international humanitarian aid networks.

As the certification process was not unanimously accepted as being a mechanism which would allow the quality of humanitarian responses to be improved, what ideas emerged to obtain this improvement?

There are already a large number of standards, norms and framework documents which deal with quality and accountability in the humanitarian sector. Rather than having to invent a new standard, one of the main challenges facing humanitarian staff is knowing which standard to apply and how to use it. This difficulty can be illustrated by the perverse use of the Sphere indicator for potable water supply in an emergency situation: 15 litres of water per person per day. This indicator is often wrongly described as a “standard” and applied to the letter in numerous operational contexts. And yet, the recommended volume of potable water per person and per day varies enormously depending on the context: 300 litres per person per day in an Ebola treatment centre compared to 5 litres of water per person per day in a drought response context in the Sahel. During the last Autumn School, the participants therefore felt that before any discussion about the normative aspect of improving the quality of humanitarian operations there should be a review of existing documents, standards, etc. in order to map what exists and identify any potential gaps. It seems important to conduct this review before rushing to define new norms and standards or discuss the normative aspect of the quality of humanitarian action. This mapping process would help to disseminate documents which have already been produced, reinforce the use of existing quality and accountability mechanisms and measure their impact on the quality of humanitarian operations more systematically. We felt that, for the time being, the evaluation of the impact of different tools and mechanisms on the quality of humanitarian operations is mainly based on the perception of a small group and not on objective and rigorous data. As such it is not possible to prove that they have any impact, whether positive or negative.

This review process is certainly long and hard going, and it may seem easier to turn our back on the past by proposing a finished solution which combines universal standards and a certification process. However, this seems simplistic given the diversity of operational contexts and the communities that humanitarian organizations work with. It would also destroy any learning process connected to existing mechanisms and norms.

The discussions at the 2014 edition of the Autumn School focused a great deal on the normative aspect of improving quality: CHS, certification, labels, etc. It is important to remember that though the normative aspect is important, a standard does not guarantee quality. This is all the more true if it is not legally enforceable by aid beneficiaries.

Hélène Juillard, SOLIDARITÉS INTERNATIONAL Head of the Technical and Programme Quality Department

1. Videos of this launch workshop are available at: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUwctcsWrPM3eoITFN8rw
2. Created in 1972, the SCHR currently includes nine members (ACT Alliance, CARE, CARITAS, ICRC, the World Lutheran Foundation, IFRIC, Save the Children, Oxfam and World Vision) with the objective of improving the accountability and impact of humanitarian operations. For more information: http://schr.info

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Integrating complexity and uncertainty into the quality debate
François Grünewald

The debate on quality and certification is often limited to questions of procedures, protocols, and indicators. But it is dangerous to limit the debate in this way when complex and unpredictable situations call for rapid and flexible action. There is tension between “doing things right” and “doing the right things”.

Quality assurance consists of managing pre-identified “critical points”. Logical frameworks and other planning tools are theoretically expected to guide us towards clear objectives. Standards and other norms should allow us to conduct our activities as well as possible and in a coherent way within an organisation, or a group of organisations. However, as they say in the army, “no plan survives contact with the enemy”.

Revisiting past experiences is essential in order to identify poorly-managed critical points and the results of potential conflict between well-designed and well-planned humanitarian operations and complex and turbulent realities. We can learn a lot from looking back at the lessons from the 2004 Tsunami, the 2010 Haiti earthquake and the crises in Chad, Somalia and the Middle East.

Desegregating complexity and turbulence

Humanitarian aid programmes which are ineffective, or which may even “do harm”, are generally the result of an insufficiently fine-tuned diagnosis of the situation. This often leads to security incidents, loss of access to the population, and inappropriate delivery of basic services. It is therefore very important to understand the complexity of situations.

Cultural and religious complexity: There is no shortage of examples which show the importance of these dimensions. In Chad, the ethnic and socio-cultural fabric of the country and the complex relations between the pastoral, agro-pastoral and agricultural groups is a key factor which affects the definition of needs. In Somalia, the complex clan system and the interaction between traditional Somali values and the current rise of a more monotheistic Islamic system are amongst the numerous factors which have shaped the current conflict and explain certain problems in terms of access to the population. Lack of understanding of these issues has led numerous organisations to run inappropriate programmes and put communities and their staff in danger.

Situations with a mixture of political and religious issues which are difficult to grasp: Political processes, which are often linked to religious processes, are different in each area and are key parameters in the development of disaster management capacities and the establishment of effective and accountable basic services. As such, authorities can either accept or reject humanitarian aid organisations depending on their own political interests at a given time. In order to be able to operate in these contexts, it is therefore necessary to read political situations, which is not always the strong point of humanitarian aid organisations.

Humanitarian aid programmes which are ineffective, or which may even “do harm”, are generally the result of an insufficiently fine-tuned diagnosis of the situation.

The new challenges of working in “high risk zones”: “High risk zones” are characterised by the rise of climate change-related disasters, and rapid and unplanned urbanization linked to rural poverty, which is the result of lack of work in rural areas, the difficulty of making a living from agriculture, and growing competition over natural resources. On the one hand, there is the tendency for people to settle in unsafe areas. On the other, the socio-economic equation in these urban areas plays an important role in shaping the centrifugal forces that challenge the powers in place in numerous contexts. Understanding this set of parameters is a key factor in the definition of programmes, negotiation of access and whether projects are successful in the end.

Thus, in many parts of the world, people question whether aid really has any effect. There are many different reasons, some objective and justified, some less so, for this crisis of confidence: the corruption of elites, the fact that the aid community is overly indulgent of unacceptable practices, problems of dialogue between national civil societies and international aid organizations, poor coordination and serious gaps in responses, lack of faith in national disaster management systems, the manipulation of aid for political ends, and the impression that the humanitarian system is self-serving. This facet of the problem needs to be taken into account in the debate on quality in order to establish how to rebuild confidence in these contexts which are always different.
The Quality of humanitarian aid: significant progress despite numerous ongoing challenges

Numerous tools and methods have been developed on the basis of lessons learned from previous operations. As a result, the aid system has made significant progress in terms of reacting and responding to the need for assistance, thus demonstrating its ability to innovate, even though a certain number of challenges remain.

For disasters triggered by natural hazards, the quality of the response is largely the result of upstream efforts, notably considerable investment in disaster preparedness. As a result, fewer people now die from large-scale rapid-onset disasters, as was seen in India after the recent Orissa Cyclone and in the Philippines following Typhoon Haiyan. The shift from the Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction programs launched nearly 20 years ago to a broader approach today which also includes support to national mechanisms by UN bodies (UNDAC, UNDP), EU bodies (DG ECHO and EERC), the World Bank and the OECD shows that the Hyogo Framework for Action has been taken seriously.

This change can also be seen in the advocacy work developed by UNISDR, NGOs and more recently taken up by the Political Champions for Disaster Resilience (USAID, DFID, EC, OCHA, UNDP and a few governments). When governments are committed to establishing proper disaster protocols, this has a huge impact in reducing the lethality of disasters.

There is still insufficient effort to improve urban planning and land management and this increases the risks affecting people and the difficulty of implementing responses in the event of a crisis. The international community and national authorities are currently calling for urbanization and land management to be part of a “risk informed paradigm”. While this is often seen by observers as pure rhetoric, there are nevertheless signs that these issues are beginning to be taken seriously. In certain “post-disaster” contexts (Haiti, the Philippines), urban and land management plans have been designed or are in the process of being designed and significant resources have been invested. However, these processes are so slow that people in affected areas have finally taken their fate into their own hands and are building or rebuilding in high-risk zones, with limited use of anti-seismic, cyclone or flood resistant construction codes. In many contexts, unfortunately, political uncertainty linked to complex electoral agendas and governance issues is not conducive to proper “risk informed” recovery efforts, sound development or resilience building. Though the aid system itself is still too often blind and incoherent with regard to these situations, national elites also have to face up to their responsibilities. At the same time, some of the key messages from the iterative real-time evaluations we have carried out in these different environments are beginning to be integrated into aid mechanisms.

Cash transfer programmes have considerable potential to improve the quality of assistance by giving beneficiaries the capacity to make choices. This new type of programme gives people the opportunity to decide what they need and consequently decide what their priorities are. In certain cases, this can lead to decisions about priority needs which are different from the decisions traditionally made by aid organisations: social spending in order to remain in mutual help networks, paying of debts, etc. More than just a change in operational methods, this is a veritable paradigm shift for aid.

Adopting “urban lenses” to adapt humanitarian programmes to urban contexts. Over the last 15 years, we have frequently underlined the difficulties of working in urban contexts. This issue has finally begun to receive the attention that it deserves. UNHABITAT in particular has done some magnificent work to ensure that the issue is at the centre of the IASC’s activities, and there has been a significant increase in the number of research projects, guidelines, and publications since the Haiti earthquake. In addition, there has been a great deal of progress in terms of the way urban systems, services and institutions are taken into account. This can be seen in relation to coordination with municipal authorities. The aid system is highly centralised by nature and is supposed to work with national authorities. However, the worldwide tendency towards de-centralization has given more and more responsibility to municipal authorities. These were frequently by-passed in Aceh, in the Philippines, and in Haiti. But, this now seems to be changing, and though the need to ensure coherence at the national level is still there, the centre of gravity of coordination is slowly moving towards the field level. This could radically affect the way Clusters function in the future. While the national level is favourable to a “silo” approach, the field level requires interconnectivity, and area-based and multi-sector coordination. Working in cities which have been destroyed, such as those of Syria and Iraq, represents a new kind of challenge. In these cities, with collapsed buildings, sniper positions and frequent hostage taking, civilian populations live in anxiety and deprivation. Local organizations show great courage in
conducting operations, but it is very difficult to provide them with support. As such, how does the debate on quality address these contexts which are becoming more common?

**Communicating with the population and engaging with affected communities is a prerequisite for providing humanitarian aid.** Unfortunately, since the Global Study on Participation (Groupe URD-ALNAP, 2002-2004) and despite the efforts of the Communication with Affected Populations Project and the Listening Project engagement with the population is often minimal and little has really changed. The responses in Banda Aceh, Sri Lanka, Manila and Haiti were like caricatures of the wrong approach. Aid agencies arrived, with many staff unable to engage with the population due to linguistic or cultural barriers. There was very little effort to listen to local people, and new “committees” were created in areas where there were already social structures in place.

The growing role of social networks and the development of new means of communication are changing the rules of the game. It will be more and more difficult for the aid system to function using “interventionist” methods, as it often has in the past in Southeast Asia, in Haiti and in Africa.

In this rapidly changing context, the question which has not been raised sufficiently is who determines what quality means, in the end? In conflict situations in the Middle East, where cross-border operations are increasingly difficult and the presence of international aid organizations is more and more dangerous, communication is often only possible via new technologies. But what can be done when the state controls the internet, when the army scrambles telecommunications and when being caught communicating with the outside world leads immediately to the death penalty?

**How can we take into account the critical challenges ahead in the debate on quality?**

Though in relatively standard situations (population displacement, etc.) organisations have learned and improved their practices, numerous critical challenges remain for operations in more complex and less documented situations like the Middle East today, the Ebola crisis and new risks like chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) dangers combined with natural disasters or conflicts. It is therefore urgent to explore these new challenges from a ‘quality’ perspective.

**The domino theory or cascading disasters: HazMat and technological risks.** A current development in relation to hard-hitting rapid-onset hazards is the increasing frequency of “cascading disasters” (the domino effect). An event can affect an industrial zone where different materials are stored, including hazardous materials (HazMat), and where there are often insufficient protective or mitigation measures. The destruction of “critical infrastructures” (energy, communication hubs, etc.) by a flood or an earthquake can drag a whole population back to the Middle Ages. In Iraq, for example, there have been numerous technological and environmental disasters since the first Iraq war (1991), with the destruction of numerous oil extraction installations. What will happen with the current war in Syria? What will the repercussions be for the population and what quality aid will need to be provided?

The acceleration of urbanization (houses increasingly close to dangerous industrial installations), and the increase in the number of storage sites and the transportation of dangerous products mean that there is greater risk of CBRN disasters despite technological progress. The weaker the national governance of risk, the higher the risk. Unfortunately, the type of equipment and personnel that are needed to intervene in these types of situations are not part of standard humanitarian responses. These very specialized mechanisms are expensive and complex to use properly. However, the recent Ebola crisis showed that certain organisations have a high capacity to innovate which allowed them to operate in a dangerous P4 Virus environment. Can the system learn something from this situation?

**Black swans: the worst is never certain.** Sadly, black swans1 (rare though not improbable events with a significant impact) sometimes take place. Haiti experienced its worst ever earthquake in 2010 though some experts had said that there would never be anything as big as the Tsunami response ever again. In the same way, nobody predicted the Arab Spring and the repercussions this had in Syria and Libya and nobody predicted the type of cyclone that hit Tacloban in November 2014. Who would have bet that the crisis in Syria would lead to the emergence of an organisation like Islamic State, or that war would be raging again on
Europe’s doorstep in Ukraine? Very few observers predicted that Ebola would reach cities and migration routes. Uncertainty is a very serious challenge that only better anticipatory science and “no regrets” creativity can address.

In conclusion

Humanitarian organisations need to be better prepared, and more effective and accountable, but at the same time, they seem to have become risk averse because their programmes are increasingly based systematically on tried and tested solutions, even when faced with new problems. With regard to this precise point, the debate about quality needs to be open to new ideas. It needs to help humanitarians to look squarely at the future. And as what lies ahead is not necessarily very reassuring, keeping the debate as vibrant and creative as possible will allow the sector to remain agile.

François Grünewald, Executive and Scientific Director, Groupe URD


Point of view

Contrasting views – including ‘Neutrality’ in the CHS

There was heated debate about whether or not to include the principle of Neutrality during the consultation process which accompanied the elaboration of the CHS. In the end, the decision was made to retain it (along with the principles of Humanity, Impartiality and Independence), but with the following caveat:

“Some organisations, while committed to giving impartial assistance and not taking sides in hostilities, do not consider that the principle of neutrality precludes undertaking advocacy on issues related to accountability and justice.”

In that Point of View section, we asked Anne de Riedmatten, 1st Secretary, Humanitarian Affairs Section, Swiss Permanent Mission to the UN and Nigel Timmins, Deputy Humanitarian Director at Oxfam GB to explain the position and reasoning of their respective organisations.

Despite their contrasting views on the issue of ‘Neutrality, both organizations support the Core Humanitarian Standard and hope that it will be very widely adopted.

Why should neutrality be included / not be included in the CHS?

Anne de Riedmatten - The Swiss government was adamant to include Neutrality in the document. According to us, the principles of Humanity, Neutrality, Impartiality and Independence are critical in building trust and acceptance with authorities, armed groups and communities.

While the principle of Humanity is often seen as overarching, the principles of Independence, Impartiality and Neutrality are operational guidelines to gain acceptance, ensure effective humanitarian assistance and protection as well as to promote rapid and unimpeded access. It is also a very important principle in regard to the safety and security of humanitarian actors. In this sense, the principle of Neutrality is key since it helps to distinguish humanitarian assistance and protection from other forms of relief actions provided by other actors, such as armed forces, armed groups and private corporations.

The core principles, including Neutrality, provide humanitarians with an operational foundation that helps them distinguish their work and activities from other stakeholders and therefore protects them from aligning their humanitarian engagement with political and military objectives.
We fully understand the challenges of implementing the core principles. Therefore, humanitarian action needs to remain highly pragmatic in practice. The combination of both approaches, the principles in action together with the field reality, including its constraints, is a powerful vector: it helps to create and sustain a humanitarian space where civilians are protected.

We see in the CHS, which now includes Neutrality, a real opportunity to highlight the true added value of a Principled humanitarian approach, even while recognizing the challenges of putting the Principles into practice and the pragmatic approach which is therefore needed to make it work.

**Nigel Timmins** - Oxfam would have preferred not to include neutrality in the CHS for two reasons.

Firstly, it risks limiting the universal adoption of the standard which it is hoped will be used by any actor in a humanitarian setting, not just the traditional humanitarian sector.

The standard is to be a "core" or minimum standard and so only really needs two of the values - humanity and impartiality. Obviously any organisation may choose to hold itself to further principles but neutrality and independence are derived, as described by J. Pictet in 1979, to better manage how humanitarian actors are perceived and so improve access to those in need. In practice many actors are neither neutral nor independent but still deliver life saving assistance. For example, the State should meet its obligations and ensure the needs of citizens are met, but any government is unlikely to be neutral and cannot be independent in the way the principle means. In the context of a conflict we would wish any occupying military force to meet the basic human rights of populations under their control despite clearly not being neutral. We want such actors and others – faith institutions, the private sector - to adopt the quality commitments set out in the CHS. We do not want them to dismiss such quality standards because they do not see themselves apriori as humanitarian actors. Institutions providing aid may have political objectives, military aims or simply allegiances that render them not neutral but we would still wish their assistance, as a minimum, to be based purely on the needs of the affected and given without discrimination by ethnicity, sex, age, faith, etc.

Secondly, by including neutrality we risk fuelling the accusation of hypocrisy. The most widely accepted definitions of neutrality - those held by the IFRC and UN GA include the phrase "... engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature." This is difficult to uphold if trying to undertake a rights based approach. Few humanitarian actors would have any problem with agreeing to not take sides in a conflict, but in many cultures articulating the need to respect rights is to engage in controversial areas such as gender relations, issues of ethnicity, freedom of expression and so on. Some argue this second phrase in the definition does not restrict campaigning but, for example, to campaign to limit arms flows into a conflict zone is likely to be seen as controversial by the parties to that conflict and their constituencies. Increasingly, in many countries, even to highlight a humanitarian crisis such as a famine is seen as controversial. The value of neutrality is in the trust it builds through shaping how others perceive us. The risk is that by claiming to be neutral but then speaking out will lead to accusations of hypocrisy and so undermine the trust we seek.

**What could the longer term implications be of including/ not including neutrality in the CHS?**

**Anne de Riedmatten** - As previously mentioned, working in accordance with the core principles is not always an easy task. Yet, it is by definition what humanitarian assistance and protection is all about: a constant challenge that requires effort, persistence and investment to make it happen.

In today's increasingly complex and polarized humanitarian environment, we believe that a principled humanitarian action continues to make a difference in accessing and serving populations in need. The promotion of the principles, including Neutrality, is even more critical when considering the serious deterioration of the security environment the humanitarians have to operate in. The fragmentation of armed groups is a reality, and only increases the risk of confusion between humanitarians and other stakeholders. Neutrality, as one of the guiding principles, contributes to maintaining access and proximity to populations in need, which – in return – are significant elements for humanitarians' security.
Those last years, we witnessed emerging new actors, who chose different operating modes and do not necessarily recognize the added value of principles, while their track records demonstrate good access to beneficiaries. We now have to reflect and ponder on how those different models can coexist, while keeping some of the values that we hold dear. For instance, an interesting initiative is the workshop on Humanitarian Principles and the Code of Conduct which was jointly organized by ICVA and the ICRC in Amman in June 2014. The objective of this workshop was to compare the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs with other existing codes used by Islamic organizations in order to explore similarities among principles.

Nigel Timmins - The long term implications are that we risk losing the trust of new actors in the humanitarian sector and that they in turn bypass the established coordination architecture and fail to learn from hard-earned experience about what does and does not work.

The “Traditional” or “Western” humanitarian movement comes in for a lot of criticism from those outside the West. Many articulate the view that it is hypocritical, espousing one set of values but behaving differently (e.g. Responsibility to Protect, which was developed to protect civilian populations, is now seen by some as a pretext by the West to justify armed intervention).

Whilst many INGOs actively strive to be independent, an analysis of funding flows shows that many humanitarian organisations are dependent on a relatively small number of States for their financing which opens up the space for criticism that they are being co-opted into foreign policy objectives. Similarly, claiming to be neutral but taking up policy positions and conducting advocacy campaigns risks accusations of hypocrisy. Unless our actions match our rhetoric we risk a future of ever shrinking humanitarian space.

A further risk is that some authorities use this commitment to silence humanitarian organisations. They may use the commitment to not "... engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature" as reason to permit the provision of assistance but not permit any public statements they choose to consider “controversial”.

Is it not paradoxical that it was the representatives of states and UN agencies who were pushing for it to be included?

Anne de Riedmatten - The Swiss Foreign policy, in the field of humanitarian aid, is based on the principles of Independence, Neutrality, Impartiality and Humanity. Being a neutral country without a colonial past, as well as State depository of the Geneva Conventions, bears potential to contribute ensuring respect for international law. We also encourage our humanitarian partners to respect a principled approach in their operational programs and thus allocate our grants through the scope of their implementation of the core principles.

Nigel Timmins - I do not understand how a State can claim to be neutral other than those that are in all aspects of their foreign policy, such as Switzerland. Most countries participate in coalitions to further foreign policy objectives. Their aid programmes can still be humanitarian if based on the humanitarian imperative and impartial, but to concurrently claim to be neutral is... surprising.

Any other comments about the CHS?

Anne de Riedmatten - Switzerland is engaged in promoting initiatives and approaches that put affected people in the center. Beneficiaries must be empowered to influence the type and the effectiveness of the humanitarian assistance they receive. In this regard, we believe that accountability towards affected people goes hand in hand with the promotion of standards. The CHS is a valuable contribution to the empowerment of affected people and can help in achieving progress on that challenging – but yet essential – issue. For instance, the fact that the Commitments are articulated around what the communities are entitled to receive and expect, is new and very valuable. The simplification of language is also an added value, since it makes the document accessible to a wider audience, including the beneficiaries themselves.
We very much look forward to the guidance tools that are currently being produced, as we fear that without them, it is still currently difficult for humanitarian organizations and personnel to assess how far they reached the standard or what is still left to achieve, and ultimately, how to design a valuable program.

Lastly, the fact that URD joined HAP, SPHERE and People in Aid in this initiative is a very positive development according to us.

Nigel Timmins - Ultimately a quality standard tool such as the CHS is not going to address some of the fundamental questions around humanitarianism. A single core standard that actors can rally around will hopefully drive up performance on the ground, but the acid test will be whether the communities we serve notice any improvement.

Anne de Riedmatten, 1st Secretary, Humanitarian Affairs Section, Swiss Permanent Mission to the UN
Nigel Timmins, Deputy Humanitarian Director at Oxfam GB

Improving quality, standardisation and the role of funding agencies
Luciano Loiacono

This article presents Handicap International’s views about the constraints that many NGOs face in trying to improve quality and accountability, the implications of standardisation and certification initiatives and the role of funding agencies.

Standardisation, certification and institutional funding

Over the last two years, Handicap International has had some questions about the objectives of two parallel initiatives: the Joint Standards Initiative (JSI), a project to consolidate humanitarian standards led by the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP International), People In Aid and the Sphere Project, which led to the Core Humanitarian Standard; and particularly the humanitarian Certification project, initiated by the Standing Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR).

Handicap International’s critical position is based on three points which concern the economy of the sector and the role of funding agencies:

1. These initiatives address the concerns of organizations who work on standards and certification – and the donors that fund them – but are not really a priority for the majority of operational organisations who are primarily concerned with problems of access and security in conflict zones, and the stagnation of international funding;

2. Global certification will not replace existing controls and audits and will represent an additional load for operational organisations who are already extensively controlled by their institutional donors. Certification will effectively provide these donors with a new mechanism for selecting NGOs in the name of quality;

3. Current competition between NGOs over access to institutional funds is not between organisations who are concerned about quality and accountability on the one hand, and more casual organisations who could be filtered out by certification on the other. It is essentially between professionalised organizations who are structured and equipped to manage and run projects, provide reports and meet regulatory and contractual controls. Certification would not work as a filter against amateur projects which are unable to meet the criteria currently fixed by institutional donors anyway. Neither would it be effective against programmes by sectarian movements who have their own – sometimes considerable – private resources, and who implement programmes wherever they want, and often with the permission of the authorities of the host country.

The levers available to institutional donors

During the preparatory discussions about the Core Humanitarian Standard and global Certification, the role of donors was a constant refrain, whether in terms of praise, hope or regret (that they either did too much or too little). The figure of the “beneficiary” was used to
justify every proposal while the “donor” was called upon
to play the role of sheriff and referee of last resort, as
everyone knows that donors play, or can play, a key role
in determining the direction of the sector that they fund.
Indeed, of the two sources of funds which supply the
humanitarian sector, institutional funding agencies,
should, in principle, be more structured and more
predictable than private donors as, theoretically, public
opinion is more volatile. Institutional funds come from
national and multi-lateral bodies; and they are
established via long term policies and relatively
concerted – and sometimes even converging –
strategies. This at least is the ambition of key actors like
the European agencies, the United Nations agencies or
the aid agencies of major donor countries. In theory, if
quality was to replace risk management as donors’ top
priority, funding agencies would have significant levers
to help improve it.

What means do donors have at their disposal to
guide the sector?

**The orientation of policies in the sector.** Through
their strategies, policies and priorities, funding agencies
automatically put pressure on the projects of the
operators that they fund, whether international
organizations or NGOs, as well as the host countries.
Furthermore, funding agencies can put pressure on
other donors through self-regulation mechanisms such as
the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative,
which, in 2003, saw the European Union and 17 other
donors adopt a number of principles aimed at increasing
the coherence, efficiency and transparency of aid. These
principles have now been adopted by 41 donor
countries. Also, though donors influence sector policies,
they are also subjected to pressure from international
organizations, large NGOs, coalitions and
standardization and certification bodies, who try to
promote their view of the humanitarian sector, their
priorities and their solutions.

**The selection of operators.** At the operational level,
the main way that donors can influence the sector, and
no doubt the most effective, consists of choosing
operators – and therefore ruling out others – by means
of a selection process which leads to a partnership
agreement for a limited but renewable period. The
selection process concerns both the organisation’s
capacities and the services it provides in relation to the
orientation and areas of interest of the donor. During
the selection process, the issue of quality is generally
covered by an evaluation of the level of expertise, and of
permanent mechanisms and methods for planning,
monitoring and evaluating the quality of programmes. In
addition, the organisation is asked about its
commitment to standards (Sphere, etc.) and its
adherence to specialized bodies who promote good
practices and accountability. Selection of this kind,
which tends to create limited clubs of operators, can be
justified in terms of managing interaction and
controlling risk, on the condition that management
obligations do not lead to an artificial simplification of
realities and an excessive concentration of funds within
a small number of operators, to the detriment of
different approaches and different forms of expertise.

**The negotiation of contractual commitments.** In any
case, the establishment of a partnership does not
exempt the operator from submitting project proposals
for approval from the funding agency’s services. Within
a funding contract, operators and donors need to agree
about the level, scale and nature of obligations, whether
these concern programming, operational methods or
expected results, and whether they are quantitative or
qualitative. Adherence to contractual commitments,
including in terms of quality, can then be verified in
different ways: reporting, monitoring and audits.

**Reporting.** Pressure from the donor is essentially
exerted through reporting. Organisations have to
explain how they have spent the funds they received,
which is completely justified. At the very least, they have
to write and send regular activity reports about how
projects are progressing – in general, a mid-term report
and another at the end of the project. These reports
make it possible to check results in relation to the initial
objectives, as well as the quality of the aid delivered.

**Direct monitoring.** Certain funding agencies have
enough resources to have a significant presence in the
field, such as ECHO and USAID, which means that they
do not have to limit themselves to reporting by NGOs.
They can ask for their regional offices to carry out
monitoring, either by their staff or by means of external
evaluations carried out by consultants. Donors who do
not have this field presence have to make do with
reporting or audits.

**Audits.** Audits are legitimate. They are a means of
analysing practices and all professional organisations
conduct these. But it is clear that nowadays, audits are the
most common method of checking whether contractual
commitments are being respected, including amongst
donors who have the means to carry out field monitoring.
Audits focus primarily on whether contractual conditions
have been met and their number creates a detrimental
burden for operators and for commissioning bodies.
Indeed, audits are primarily focused on financial aspects
and spending procedures. The recommendations from
Two ideas to avoid...

Applying the same approach which is currently used for audits to the evaluation of quality

The first idea to avoid is to try to apply methods which are generally applied to audits to the evaluation of quality and the impact of projects. These methods, which are based on administrative and financial approaches, focus on gaps between “rules” and “practices”. Obviously, it is possible to assess the commitments of an organisation on the basis of the resources and competencies that it mobilizes to achieve its objectives in terms of quality. However, it is not reasonable to try to measure gaps in terms of quality based solely on the degree of methodological compliance or the quantitative results obtained.

Excessive standardisation of methods, techniques and indicators would lead to less pertinent approaches and less well-matched competencies being mobilized. This would not provide any more useful information about the quality of the projects carried out because measuring impact raises methodological questions which concern not only operational approaches but also the ownership of the project by the beneficiaries and the perception that they have of quality and how their living conditions have evolved. We all know how difficult it is to attribute the impact of operations to particular causes. The performance of a project, that is to say the effects it has in improving the living conditions of those who are assisted, depends on a number of factors, some of which are completely independent of the will of the donor and that of the operational partner. This reality can be seen every day in the Syrian crisis.

Global certification as a substitute for quality approaches and efforts to improve quality

Evaluating organisations’ activities in a simplistic way and with the threat of financial penalties (repayment), would end up encouraging NGOs to avoid complex situations and give priority to standard operations which are easier to implement and do not involve a great deal of risk for the operator. This would necessarily be to the detriment of the humanitarian
imperative which is based on an obligation of means related to the needs and rights of beneficiaries to be saved and assisted. This imperative implies taking a calculated risk where there is no guarantee that activities will conform to technical norms or that specific results will be achieved. This is relevant both for audits and for certification.

Global certification is the second idea to avoid. Some donors may try to make savings or make their lives easier by backing certification to improve accountability and humanitarian quality. There is no doubt that the setting up and maintenance of an international certification mechanism will depend, for the most part, on funds allocated by funding agencies. But it is crucial that attempts to put in place international certification do not deflect resources which should be devoted to monitoring, evaluation and learning.

A few proposals to conclude

We have already expressed some of the ideas presented below within NGO collectives.

Generalisation of framework agreements. The first idea is the setting up and generalization of framework agreements, based on a prior audit of the partner NGO, which would help to avoid unnecessary repeated controls of governance and organizational, administrative and financial capacities. In the long term, these agreements could allow mutual commitments to be defined in terms of improving quality, measuring impact and learning lessons. They could also provide the basis for dialogue based on mutual trust between the NGO and the donor with regard to the issues of pertinence, adaptation and the quality of projects, which would cover not only what was successful, but also what was problematic in the field.

Sharing assessments of reliability. The second idea is to establish reciprocal agreements about the reliability of audited NGOs between funding agencies linked to the same political entities or communities (such as the European Union and the Member States) for a given duration, in order to lighten controls and free up resources for the evaluation of quality, learning lessons and the sharing of experiences. This proposal, and the previous one, implies a significant change in mentality and positioning, closer relations between donors and operators, and the optimization of synergy between financial bodies whose policies are compatible.

Accountability and quality come at a price and this needs to be recognised. The third idea is better coverage by funding agencies of structural costs which would allow organizations to meet the increasing demands in terms of regulations, transparency and performance. These structural costs, which both funding agencies and the public do not like, obviously have to be maintained at the right level and need to be constantly monitored by organizations. That said, they are unavoidable for any organisation which wants to develop, maintain, and reinforce a professional and durable structure which has the capacity to take action in the long term. The issue at stake here is not only to pay for the things which have been demanded by donors and regulatory bodies, but also to transform this effort into added value for the beneficiaries of our projects: people affected by crises, disasters and war.

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Relations between national authorities and humanitarian organisations: an aspect of quality which is too often forgotten

Charles-Antoine Hofmann

Any reflection about the quality of humanitarian aid is likely to remain sterile if its scope is limited to humanitarian actors alone. It obviously needs to take into account beneficiary communities who are the most concerned by quality. It also has to consider the role of state bodies to the extent that they have responsibilities vis-à-vis the population. Though in recent years there has been progress in terms of quality, and particularly accountability to crisis-affected people, this article argues that there is still need for reflection about relations between humanitarian actors and states.

The development of the role of state actors

In recent years, state bodies have increased their capacity to manage the response to disasters. Many countries have set up national disaster management agencies to respond to local to medium intensity situations and coordinate the response. Civil society organizations often play a crucial role in this. There is also frequently the desire on the part of the states to maintain their sovereign rights, and, consequently, to not appear totally dependent on international aid.

Legislative and institutional efforts to build national capacity, which are generally supported, if not initiated, by civil society organizations, with frequent technical or financial support from international organizations (Harkey, 2014), have led to positive results in terms of reducing the number of victims of natural disasters. For example, the mass evacuation as a preventive measure against cyclone Phailin, which hit the east coast of India in October 2013, helped to significantly reduce the number of victims (47 people) compared to cyclone Odisha, which was the same strength, and caused more than 9 000 deaths in 1999 (source: CRED EM-DAT). Similarly, progress has been made in Bangladesh thanks to the combined action of government bodies and civil society organizations, with technical and financial support from international agencies: mortality was divided by 100 between the cyclone in 1970 which caused more than 500 000 deaths and cyclone Sidr in 2007. Mozambique, which is subject to recurring flooding, has also put in place national mechanisms which have contributed significantly to reducing the human impact of these disasters. There are numerous other examples of the positive impact that can be achieved by reinforcing the role of states in the management of disasters which affect them.

The increasing capacity of state and civil society organizations in numerous contexts, particularly in middle income countries, has major implications for the role of international humanitarian organizations. In natural disaster situations these developments are like a form of nationalization, or even the establishment of state control over humanitarian action. But in conflict situations, where humanitarian actors continue to play a dominant role, they are of a completely different dimension. It is therefore important to look more closely at the relationship between states and humanitarian actors in different contexts.

Relations between states and humanitarian actors

The essential role of states in humanitarian aid is clearly recognised in the different normative texts which determine the rules or guidelines of humanitarian action. Resolution 46/182 of the United Nations General Assembly recognises the primary role of states to take care of the victims of natural disasters and other emergency situations. This confers the role of initiating, organizing and implementing humanitarian aid on their territory. Other texts such as the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative, adopted by the main funding agencies, and the Sphere Humanitarian Charter use very similar language. In reality, the essential role of states in humanitarian responses is very often neglected, relations between states and humanitarian actors often being a source of tension. Why is this?

Though fundamentally apolitical, humanitarian action does take place in the political realm. This political dimension is obvious in conflict situations. It can also be present in the response to natural disasters: the capacity or not of a
government to respond to people’s needs after a disaster, and the tensions which can follow, have an eminently political character. Another example is reticence to ask for international aid out of fear of losing face with regard to the population. Developed countries are not immune to situations of this kind: the international response to hurricane Katrina in the United States showed this. Similarly, determining the nature and scale of needs is often a source of tension as there are regularly significant differences between analysis by a state and analysis by humanitarian actors. And yet, involving government bodies in assessing needs can help to minimize this kind of tension (ACAPS, 2012).

International humanitarian organisations, and particularly NGOs, generally have a policy of avoiding states. The sovereignty of states is often seen in negative terms, despite the fact that it is legitimate, as suggested above. Though this attitude is understandable in certain cases, such as when the state is a party to a conflict, it is not justified in many other cases and contributes to creating a climate of distrust. This can be problematic and can lead to duplication, parallel coordination processes, delays and inefficiency which end up having a negative impact on people who require assistance. NGOs are regularly criticized for not sufficiently sharing information about their activities and for bypassing local and national bodies. For their part, certain states are increasingly open about their distrust of NGOs, and instigate restrictive administrative procedures. In this context, intergovernmental cooperation, or with military forces, regional institutions or the private sector have become interesting alternatives for states.

The increasing intensity and frequency of disasters is a severe test for even the most developed countries to provide assistance to their populations without external aid. It is therefore crucial that stakeholders work together. Too often, lack of trust, and insufficient legal frameworks to manage international assistance and the inherent challenges of coordinating increasingly diverse organizations are detrimental to the quality and effectiveness of operations when a disaster takes place. The “Disaster Response Dialogue” has shown how useful it is to have exchanges between all stakeholders, including states, in order to increase mutual trust and cooperation. It is based on the premise that effective cooperation between all stakeholders, which is vital for aid effectiveness, depends on more frequent dialogue between all national and international stakeholders.

At the conference in Manila, the Dialogue concluded that local and national stakeholders should always be the first responders in disaster situations. This implies making major changes to the current aid system, which is generally always deployed in the field in the same way, without taking into account specific contexts, thereby weakening, rather than reinforcing local and national capacities.

The question of the quality and accountability of humanitarian aid has received a great deal of attention in recent decades, with a series of initiatives and developments which have been implemented since the middle of the 1990s. Apart from a few rare exceptions, the majority of these initiatives were developed without taking into consideration the role of states, and relatively few take the role of civil society at the national level into consideration. However, quality needs to be considered in relation to the national context. As mentioned above, it is first and foremost the responsibility of the government bodies in place to meet the needs of the population. What is more, there are national standards and legal frameworks which international humanitarian aid cannot disregard. International standards are often criticized for not being sufficiently adaptable to very different national contexts.

The Code of Conduct for The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, which was adopted in 1994 and is based on humanitarian principles and aims to improve the quality of aid, does not include any reference to the role of states in its ten principles of behaviour. On the other hand, in the annexes there is a description of the desired working conditions between humanitarian organisations, the governments of affected countries, donor governments and international organisations. It is interesting to note that all the recommendations concerning the governments of affected countries take the form of obligations on their part vis-à-vis humanitarian organisations: facilitating access, facilitating the timely delivery of aid, and recognising
and respecting the independence and impartiality of humanitarian organisations, without any clear obligations in return for humanitarian organisations. These could include, for example, greater transparency with regard to activities carried out in the field, or the involvement of local authorities in coordination mechanisms (when they are not parties to a conflict).

The “Guidelines for the domestic facilitation and regulation of international disaster relief and initial recovery assistance” (also known as the “IDRL Guidelines”), were adopted unanimously by the state parties to the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement at the Movement’s 30th International Conference. These give governments advice about the minimum standards that they should expect from organizations providing international assistance in the case of disasters. In return, the goal of the IDRL guidelines is to facilitate access and the provision of relief, as requested in the annexes of the Code of Conduct mentioned above. To date, 17 countries have adopted the guidelines and a further 16 are about to do so. However, they have not all taken into account this reciprocity related to quality.

It is also interesting to note that a certain number of countries have adopted the Sphere minimum standards in their emergency relief mechanisms. This is notably the case of Equator, Brazil, Indonesia and Slovenia, and other countries are considering adopting them. What is more, government representatives frequently take part in Sphere training courses.

Finally, humanitarian actors have also made significant efforts to improve their accountability to affected people. Initially promoted by certain NGOs, this agenda has become one of the IASC’s priorities. But the IASC’s documents only refer to the role of states once, and in negative terms³. What of the accountability of humanitarian actors to states? Again, certain contexts obviously make it necessary to maintain a safe distance, but in many others governments experience problems because they lack information about the activities of humanitarian organizations and their only way of monitoring relief operations is via the websites of international agencies. This was the case for the Philippine government during the response to Typhoon Haiyan as it struggled to monitor international funding, despite its own efforts to improve transparency, including very quickly establishing an internet platform, the Foreign Aid Transparency Hub, to inform the population about the value of international humanitarian aid (Hofmann et al., 2014).

**Conclusion**

Though there is continued reticence on the part of humanitarian organisations to engage more with state bodies, this is perhaps due to a fundamental misunderstanding: engagement and dialogue with state bodies does not imply common objectives and interests; these can be different, or even contradictory, but they are often complementary. What is more, this kind of engagement is not necessarily detrimental to the independence of humanitarian actors, as independence should not be confused with isolation.

The question of quality is of central importance in this context: it should be considered in connection with a triangular relationship between humanitarian actors, beneficiaries and state bodies. The recent development of the Core Humanitarian Standard, a new humanitarian quality and accountability reference framework seems a unique opportunity to establish closer dialogue with different stakeholders, and particularly government bodies, so that they can improve their understanding of what they can expect from international humanitarian organizations. Without dialogue of this kind, there is a danger that, once again, this norm will be criticized for being imposed from the outside. With this in mind, the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016 will be a crucial opportunity to initiate such a dialogue.

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1. The Disaster Response Dialogue, which ended with a global conference in October 2014 in Manila provides a platform which brings together national and international stakeholders to improve trust and mutual cooperation. The Dialogue was initiated by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (DDC), the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).
2. “Staff ensure that, whenever possible, community members and interest groups have a chance to speak free of the presence of those who might purposely or inadvertently prevent them from speaking their mind, such as elders, committee members, men, government authorities, etc. depending upon the circumstances”. IAAP self-assessment tool, IASC, 2012.
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For a number of years, the humanitarian sector has been the target of criticism from the public and donors. In order to win back their trust, NGOs need to rethink their communication, which is almost obsessively focused on the donor, in a radical way (in the etymological sense of the word). The media are a crucial ally in the battle to win back public opinion, which could, in the long run, turn its back on the humanitarian sector. But in order to establish new practices, it is necessary to consider the changes which the press (in all formats) has gone through and the current state of public opinion.

Profound change in the media landscape and in public opinion

The days when only a handful of curious individuals had access to information about what was going on on the other side of the planet are over. The advent of the internet and social networks, in an increasingly interdependent world, means that everyone now has the possibility of informing themselves easily and, even, to check information, including in the domain of international solidarity, emergency relief and development aid. The risk now for NGOs is that no one takes any notice of them or that they have to deal with the fall-out from a campaign that is bad for their image rather than not having access to the media. The media landscape has changed enormously.

Does this mean that the individuals who get their information from the web have abandoned the traditional media and that the internet has become the source of information that NGOs need to embrace? This is not what emerged from the study, “S’informer à l’ère du numérique”, led by Josiane Jouët. The French have not abandoned the traditional media; on the contrary, they consult a variety of media forms, including television, radio, the print media and internet. “The print media, which is said to be in danger, continues to have a great deal of legitimacy on the internet”, underlines Josiane Jouët. “Internet users consider the main newspapers to be reliable sources which they consult in order to be well informed, even though they believe that the coverage of events is sometimes partial. For them, the print media remains the most valuable source of information”. Though this analysis is corroborated by the Baromètre TNS Sofres – La Croix sur la confiance dans les médias 2014 [a survey of levels of trust in the media], which found that 69% of French people are very interested in the news provided by the media (in all its forms), at the same time, the poll found that only 55% consider that “things really happened, or more or less happened, as the written press say they did”. There is a real crisis of trust. This is a major parameter, along with the advent of the digital age.

The significant increase in the use of the internet as a source of information is accompanied by a profound change in information methods: skim reading is becoming the norm. “We analysed Médiamétrie Panel’s statistics which show that internet users spend an average of 5 minutes per day on a press website, and read around 6 pages, which means they spend an average of one minute per page”, explains Josiane Jouët. The issue at stake for the online media is therefore to retain the attention of increasingly volatile readers. Is this bad news for those who, like NGOs, try to understand the world and share their analysis? Not necessarily. What needs to be done is to adapt narrative methods and to provide topics which grab the reader’s attention, which challenge them and which help them to move forward. The transferring of links to articles and videos by email or via social networks has become a common practice of internet users, particularly those who are the most involved in issues of public interest, and therefore those who are the most susceptible to be interested in the ideas and activities of NGOs. It is important to use the ‘viral’ potential of the internet intelligently.

Getting public opinion (back) on our side

In the end, the question which this raises is what information should be provided to the media to continue to reach the public. The survey “Les Français et la politique d’aide au développement de la France” (French public opinion about France’s development aid), published by the French Development Agency in September 2014 shows that 62% of French people support the assistance that France provides to developing countries and that 73% would like to be informed more about France’s development aid. However, this interest is qualified by other statistics which show that the context is not very positive. Since 2008, the world has been going through an unprecedented crisis (in recent history at least) and public opinion is increasingly closed and inward-looking. The Ipsos / Steria survey

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Fractures françaises Vague 2: 2014² shows, unsurprisingly, that the three areas which French people are the most concerned about are unemployment, taxes and spending power. Considering the attacks which took place in Paris on 7 and 8 January, we could probably now add the issue of security. Still looking at public opinion, the Baromètre TNS Sofres – La Croix stated that 61% of French people feel that “the news media focus too much on bad news”. This statistic is not insignificant for organizations who are active in sensitive contexts and who need to mobilize support in acute crisis contexts. In short, we can say that it is more and more difficult to treat issues related to international solidarity, emergency relief and development. The task should therefore be to convince the public and not simply to bombard them with simplistic or doom-laden messages, which, at worst, given the state of the world, can give the impression of a bottomless pit that we are trying to fill... in vain. It is in no one’s interest to lock the public into fatalism and resignation.

But NGOs have long had a precious asset in the public opinion battle: the level of trust that French people have in them, which is much higher than the trust they have in politicians and trade unions. The media, in their way, have also shown a certain confidence by making humanitarian NGOs a priority source of information in emergency situations and crisis contexts, when the authorities and institutions are unable or unwilling to provide information. NGOs have always provided journalists with data and access to the field, this clearly being in the interest of both parties. But there are two sides to every coin, and trust is a fragile asset. The public is more and more sensitive and demanding about the integrity of these organizations in which they believe... and to whom they give. The same is true for journalists who have gradually found themselves faced with professional communicators who were less interested in helping them to collect information and more in influencing their work to promote their cause, highlight their activities and attract and maintain donors. Already in 2010, Pascal Dauvin argued that, “The antagonism between the two worlds was clear for all to see”, in La communication des ONG humanitaires³. “The media wants to inform people about a conflict, while NGOs want to improve their impact in the field, or project a positive image for their donors”.

Subsequently, the media enthusiastically investigated issues like the Arche de Zoé scandal, the controversy over wasted aid after the Tsunami in South-East Asia and the earthquake in Haiti, or, closer to home, the revelations about NGO directors’ pay and the working conditions in certain organizations. There is nothing more tempting than to reveal the flaws, the incoherence and the corruption of those who dress themselves in virtue. The famous journalist of the 1920s and 30s, Albert Londres, said, “A journalist is not a choirboy and his role does not consist of walking ahead of the procession, and dipping his hand in a basket full of rose petals. Our job is not to entertain, nor to injure but to dip our pen into the wound”⁴. In certain cases, this antagonism was exacerbated by the fact that, in reaction, some NGOs limited themselves to communication alone, wrapping themselves in the righteousness of their cause and refusing to take part in a debate which could have been productive. In the end, all they did was justify, or even increase, suspicion.

Establishing new relations between NGOs and journalists

In the context described above, characterised by major changes in the media world and a growing tendency for people to be inward-looking, NGOs need to rethink their relations with the media. Objective alliances are possible and desirable, particularly when we consider the mistrust that the mainstream media suffer from. There is no doubt a reason why, in contrast, there is not the same mistrust of so-called alternative or citizen-based media. But to develop this type of cooperation, NGOs need to change their attitude and stop producing slick communication with the sole objective of encouraging donations. To win back the trust of the public, it will be necessary to re-learn to speak using ideas rather than emotions. NGOs’ credibility depends on it. If they don’t, they will end up looking like “entrepreneurs”, or “sellers” of clear consciences, and they will undermine their own foundations. Newspapers came into existence with democracy and for a long time information was inseparable from the desire to shape enlightened and active citizens! NGOs and journalists can therefore come together with this objective. NGOs should provide information based on their knowledge of the context and their practices (while being careful, of course, to preserve the security of the staff active in the field) and should be prepared to discuss their successes as well as the limits of their
activities, and even their failures. Journalists should cross-check this information, analyse it and use it for editorial content in order to pertinentely feed public debate. This productive alliance between NGOs and journalists could be mutually advantageous. For this to be the case, NGOs need to accept to be simple sources, reliable and solid. Journalists, for their part, need to return to the fundamentals of their profession.

David Eloy – Chief Editor of Altermondès

Peer review - a way for the humanitarian sector to learn and improve

Julien Carlier & Hugues Maury

The launch of the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) quality and accountability reference framework raises the question of its implementation. This initiative will bring nothing new to the humanitarian sector if it is unable to encourage a sustainable change in practices within organizations. In other sectors, peer review has shown its ability to stimulate innovation and lead to the emergence of good practice by comparing different approaches. Applied to the humanitarian sector, this alternative to standards has a great deal of potential to begin a process of collective learning and reflection which would benefit all humanitarian organizations, whether small or large, old or new, well-known or unknown, from the global south or the global north.

The humanitarian community has a new Quality and Accountability reference framework: the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), which was presented in Copenhagen in December. After a broad participatory process which lasted more than a year, the majority of humanitarian organizations felt that this was a significant step towards a shared vision of quality in the sector. However, this new tool will do nothing to improve quality if it is not used correctly.

The humanitarian sector is not lacking in tools, guides or recommended practices on all kinds of subjects. In September 2014, the participants at a workshop during Groupe URD’s Autumn School on Humanitarian Aid listed no fewer than 150 reference tools for humanitarian workers... Beyond this profusion of tools that are available is the issue of how well they are used on a day to day basis. Even though the CHS is a mix of key elements from 7 well-established initiatives and will soon be accompanied by indicators and guidance notes, it remains vital to support and stimulate changes in practices within NGOs.

One of the fundamental principles of this new standard is that it is non-prescriptive; it is therefore up to each organisation or group of organizations to take inspiration from it and adapt it to their practices on a voluntary basis. This freedom of choice makes it possible to innovate and decide what form to give the quality approach. For a number of months, Groupe URD has been looking into an implementation model for the CHS based on peer review and learning between peers based on a voluntary labelling process. There are a number of successful initiatives of this kind in other sectors: for example, between OECD DAC members for the review of bilateral development cooperation systems; between health professionals for the accreditation of hospitals; and within the publishing committees of scientific reviews. This article looks at how a system of this kind could influence the diverse and complex humanitarian sector.

Peer review, an established method of learning

When we are young, we traditionally learn with teachers, that is to say “experts”, whose status, function and knowledge are very different from those of the learner. This is a form of “vertical” learning, where two worlds are juxtaposed and where mutual understanding is not always guaranteed because the learner is in the position of a spectator and passive receiver.

In adulthood, and particularly in the professional sector, learning with peers has long been used in almost all sectors which produce goods and services. The acceptability and the success of this method is due to the fact that learning is organized between individuals or groups who do the same job, who therefore have had the same training, and have the same vocabulary, the same difficulties and
constraints, the same professional objectives and the same ethical code: it is a form of “horizontal” learning. This saves time and there is greater mutual understanding, mutual legitimisation, and better communication. Hierarchical relations are removed and there is the possibility of interaction. Each party feels more concerned and involved, which naturally encourages balanced dialogue, the capacity to reflect and therefore learning; here the learner is fully active in the learning process (and not the object of transmission). What is more, learning between peers encourages mutual help and collaboration, co-construction, sharing, teamwork and “working together”. Béatrice Milard describes peer evaluations as “potential innovation generators. New kinds of exchange can take place, relational chains can be activated, groups can form (...)”.

What is interesting about an approach of this kind is the mutual emulation and enrichment which comes from comparing different ways of doing things. This dialogue leads to a shared understanding of good practices which can be of benefit to a whole sector.

In connection with the CERISE working group on savings and loans systems, 5 French organisations (GRET, CIRAD, CIDR, IRAM and CNEARC) began a peer review approach so that each organisation’s projects were evaluated by the other four organisations. This initiative lasted 3 years. These are some of the lessons learned by the 5 participants:

“Peer review helps to broaden references, to instigate a collective process of knowledge management, learning and reflection and to bring together in a complementary manner the views from inside an organisation and those from other members. (...) The participation of the members of CERISE in the peer review process showed how useful it can be to work together. The dialogue allows organizations to learn about each other’s practices and perceptions, to compare views about how the sector and the role of operational organizations are evolving, without necessarily reaching any normative conclusions: members sometimes have different points of view about the same subject.”

How can it be applied in the humanitarian sector?

One thing which is new about the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) is the fact that it broadens the issue of quality management of humanitarian projects to the management of organisations as a whole: internal leadership, internal processes with quality commitments, effective implementation of policies, the collection of performance indicators at the organizational level, etc. In these areas, everything remains to be done for a humanitarian sector which, for a long time, focused principally on the quality of programmes delivered. Indeed, a veritable cultural revolution is needed within organizations, with all the difficulties that this will imply in terms of implementing change... Though initiatives exist (ISO 9001, EFQM, and the implementation of Quality policies...), they remain isolated and the sharing of experiences is rare. Forums for discussing quality do exist, with varying levels of formality, but the subject does not receive a great deal of attention. When Quality reference points exist within organizations, they are faced with an enormous amount of work, and the lack of experience and enthusiasm in the sector for these new issues is a real handicap.

Setting up a peer review system between different NGOs would encourage the sharing of experiences and would act as a catalyst to help the sector learn in these new areas. Protection and delivering services to people affected by crises is central to the mandate of the humanitarian sector, so it seems self-evident that it should aim for the common good and shared knowledge in this way. However, such a system does not mean that there will no longer be any competition between organizations as an NGO will not give away all its “industrial” secrets during an evaluation between peers. The aim is rather to invent a new way for organizations to work and collaborate together: a system which would place the shared will to increase the quality of aid above the all too common cultural reflex of remaining closed and isolated.

The Core Humanitarian Standard is the result of unprecedented collaboration within the sector. More than 1 000 contributions were received during the three consultation phases and 60 organisations took part in the implementation tests. A peer review system based on this quality reference framework would prolong this dynamic of cooperation between organizations and would benefit not only each NGO, but also the sector as a whole. In a context where the media and the general public have lost trust in NGOs, the damaged image of humanitarian organizations would be improved.
Labelling to stimulate continuous learning and improvement

Peer review is an essential aspect of collective learning but it cannot guarantee the long-term commitment of actors to continuous improvement on its own. In the medical field (where the practice has increased exponentially in the last 80 years), peer reviews are carried out in conjunction with an accreditation system which is a source of continuous support and motivation to improve. Groupe URD’s proposal to create a Quality label for the humanitarian sector is based on the same reasoning.

Once they have become involved in the labelling process, an organisation and its staff are regularly invited to take part in an external evaluation conducted by peers, and thus regularly encouraged to improve, regardless of the vagaries of the context (change of management, of board, of strategy, of method, budgetary restrictions, different emergencies, etc.). By taking into account the weaknesses and opportunities for improvement which were noted during the previous cycle and by agreeing to an action plan, the organisation becomes involved in a virtuous circle of continuous improvement (the ratchet effect of the "Deming wheel"). This is the principle of a quality approach based on continuous improvement, a principle of quality management that is well established in the business world.

This is the first fundamental difference between the proposed labelling system and traditional certification systems. Evaluation by peers - professionals who have experienced the same difficulties - creates a climate that encourages exchange and discussion. The proposed approach encourages learning, and is based on goodwill and encouragement to improve rather than adherence to standards and sanctions when these are not respected. The objective of the peers is not to check that at a given time an organisation, a product or a service satisfies pre-established standards in terms of functioning, activities or results. Rather, it is to check whether significant progress has been made in areas of weakness which were identified during a previous visit. In this way, peer review encourages “a qualitative process rather than (...) an appraisal.” Experience in other sectors tends to show that external systems based on sanctions struggle to bring about the profound, long-term positive changes that are hoped for.

Several studies in the medical field underline that, on the whole, peer reviews have increased the motivation and productivity of the staff involved and sustainably improved the services delivered to patients. They also show a strong correlation between the results observed and the degree of confidence that participants have in the evaluation process and evaluators. In order to improve practices in the long term, it is necessary to create the right conditions for peers to accept to be told about their errors (and not to repeat them). They also need to accept to share these errors with others, so that they do not repeat them either.

This confidence which is required to stimulate learning is a second major difference between external evaluation systems - like certification - and the proposed label based on evaluation by peers. As underlined by members of the CERISE working group, peer review helped them to: “do away with the asymmetry between the evaluator and the evaluated in a regular evaluation. The situation is all the more distorted if the evaluation is imposed by the funding agency, pending a funding/refunding decision”. One of the major concerns which has been raised by the SCHR’s Certification project is precisely that it becomes a selection tool for funding agencies and states. In contrast, a peer review system is, by nature, implemented without external intervention. It exerts a form of social control between peers which makes it easier to guarantee that the information which is exchanged will not be used in a malevolent way (to damage the reputation of an individual or an organisation) and thus ensures greater independence vis-à-vis funding.

It is therefore important to be discerning in our choice of methods and tools, depending on our objective. A mechanism which aims to encourage learning and continuous improvement can only work if it is based on strong relations of trust and on the desire to promote learning rather than on sanctions.

Conclusion

The CHS is a step in the right direction but will not be enough on its own to sustainably improve the humanitarian system because it remains a declaration of intentions, one more tool, whereas it is a whole system favouring better quality and accountability which still needs to be developed. The goal is to encourage all actors to improve, whether big or small, old or new, well-known or unknown, from the global south or the global north.
The proposal outlined in this article is based on the conviction that improving practices in the sector depends on the motivation of individuals and that of organizations, as well as encouragement between these actors. As it is based on a form of network within which innovation and emulation are encouraged, a peer review system has a great deal of potential to meet this challenge. By encouraging more collaboration between organizations and creating synergy rather than exclusion, the emergence of a system of this kind could also bring new prospects of cooperation with partners in the global south (NGOs, national disaster management authorities, etc.) and create more equal and balanced relations with local actors who are going to play an increasingly important role in the future.

Julien Carlier - Quality Advisor, Groupe URD
Hugues Maury - Quality expert, Consultant for Groupe URD, paediatrician

2. The Code of Conduct for The international Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief; The 2010 HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management; The People In Aid Code of Good Practice in the Management and Support of Aid Personnel; The Sphere Handbook Core Standards and the Humanitarian Charter; The Quality COMPAS; The Inter-Agency Standing Committee Commitments on Accountability to Affected People/Populations (CAAPs); and The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Criteria for Evaluating Development and Humanitarian Assistance
5. CERISE : Comité d'Échanges, de Réflexion et d’Information sur les Systèmes d’Epargne-crédit.
12. Rethinking Peer Review: What Aviation Can Teach Radiology about Performance Improvement ; David B. Larson, MD, MBA, and John J. Nance, JD ; June 2011

Learning and humanitarian organisations: A ‘Golden Age’ of learning?

Paul Knox-Clarke

Technological advances and the ‘professionalisation’ agenda have led to a significant increase in the number of training opportunities available for humanitarian staff. But does this training translate into organisational learning and change? And how can we support the change process?

Humanitarian action is a multi-disciplinary sector, bringing together nutritionists, lawyers, epidemiologists, architects, logisticians and many others to mitigate the negative effects of crises and disasters. Knowledge and skills, as much as humanitarian principles and solidarity, have always lain at the heart of effective humanitarian action.

But the technical skills of a town planner in Cambridge might not transfer seamlessly to Kismayo. What is possible for a surgeon in Amiens is unlikely, sadly, to be possible in Aleppo, and what works in the culture and economy of Maastricht might fail in Monrovia.

Transferring knowledge and skills to the humanitarian context requires another layer of understanding: an understanding of humanitarian response, of its principles, structures, and ways of working. Many attempts to ‘professionalise’ humanitarian action take place at this level. Professionalisation is partially about ensuring that humanitarian workers have the relevant professional qualifications (in medicine or engineering, for example), but it is also about ensuring that they have an understanding of the specifics of humanitarian work: the “core competencies deemed necessary to be fit to operate in the humanitarian field” (Walker, P. and Russ, C. 2010 p.2).

Whether or not you agree with the idea of professionalization¹, the trend has led to a significant increase in training and learning activities over the past decade. In 2003, when ALNAP produced its report on Field Level Learning (Beck, T. and Borton, J, 2003), the main approaches to learning were training, networking and peer to peer exchanges. In the decade since then,
there has been a sizeable growth in the number of postgraduate courses in humanitarian action (which now include those offered by ALNAP members such as Fordham, Harvard, Manchester, Oxford Brookes and Tufts Universities). At the same time, the peer to peer exchange offered by occasions such as the Annual ALNAP meeting or the Groupe URD autumn school, and by publications such as HPN’s humanitarian exchange, have been significantly augmented by online communities of practice (CoPs) and listservs, such as the Cash Listserv of the Cash learning Partnership and the urban response and humanitarian evaluation CoPs at ALNAP. Improved internet access in many parts of the world have allowed humanitarian practitioners to learn through webinars and online courses, and initiatives such as the proposed Humanitarian Leadership Academy aim to offer learning opportunities to humanitarian workers in the global south, who have not, until now, had good access to training programmes.

So – is this a golden age of humanitarian learning? Certainly, there are an unprecedented number of opportunities for individuals to learn. It is probably safe to say that these opportunities are allowing many individuals to develop new knowledge and skills. But is this learning being used? Do the listservs, the training courses and the MAs add up to different, and more effective, behaviour on the ground? And – on the other hand - if the knowledge is not being used, does this really count as learning?

The power of learning as a tool for change

ALNAP is a network of organisations who aim to improve, the performance of humanitarian action, and who use learning as the main tool to do this. An approach to improvement that relies on learning has a number of advantages. Firstly improvements that are inspired by learning happen because people want to change the way they do things, and not because they have been told to change the way they do things. Learning creates motivation to change and improve – and so leads to longer term, more sustainable improvements. Secondly, the process of learning gives a deeper, fuller understanding of the subject than can be achieved through simply following instructions: we understand why doing things in a certain way works better, and what the options are in doing it. This means that we can tailor and adapt our improvements to the resources we have and the situation we are in.

Imagine, for example, that there are two organisations working in the same humanitarian response. In one organisation - NGO A - the country office is told that they have to set up a ‘beneficiary feedback’ programme because the donor has made this a condition of funding. In another – NGO B - staff in the office have established feedback programmes in a variety of other responses, and seen that they can make a dramatic improvement to the success of their programmes. They know the theory of how to establish a mechanism and they have discussed what works in different situations between themselves. Which NGO is more likely to establish an effective feedback mechanism?

Because ALNAP exists to use learning as a tool for change, we naturally take an interest in the factors that help turn knowledge into action, and in the factors that prevent knowledge being used. Over the last few years, we have conducted a series of studies around this topic, the most recent being ‘Insufficient evidence? The quality and use of evidence in humanitarian action’ (Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014).

What has this research shown us? Firstly, and – in the current, often negative discourse around humanitarian response - perhaps most importantly: learning works, and change happens. There are many good examples of significant improvements in humanitarian action (as measured by external evaluations) which are the result of individual and collective learning: cash programming; the institution, and subsequent adaption, of the cluster system; improved early warning and assessment systems; community based therapeutic feeding. These changes are, very largely, technical – they tend to relate to how we do things (coordination; early warning; feeding programmes) and less to what we do, or who does it. They might be thought of as incremental, rather than transformational, changes. But this does not mean they are modest or unimportant.

Because the second thing to note is that learning can only be the answer where a lack of knowledge is the problem. As humanitarians we face many problems which are ‘bigger than us’: physical insecurity in much of Syria; underfunded, under-capacitated healthcare systems in West Africa, etc. These problems are generally the grotesque outcomes of the global political and economic system, and if there are answers to them, they will not come from improvements in humanitarian response. Learning will not change the security situation for conflict affected people in Syria, or for organisations working to help them. But it might help those organisations do their job better, and more safely. It won’t change the rules of the game, but it should help us to play the game better.
Where learning fails...

Having said that, there are also plenty of situations where, even within these (realistic) limits, we have failed to learn lessons and change the way we work. Two examples of this that we considered in *Insufficient evidence* are the continuing failure of most humanitarian organisations to respond early to signs of impending food insecurity in areas of cyclic drought, and the inflexible, ‘cookie cutter’ approach that is often taken to humanitarian response, failing to look at local conditions and capacities. In both cases, we appear to know that we should be acting differently, but we don’t actually change the way we work. Why is this?

One reason might be that while we know that a change is required, we don’t know how to make the change. We cannot learn how to do things better, because – while we know there is a problem – we don’t know how that problem can be solved. A good example of this is the failure to respond effectively to drought early warning information, mentioned above. Levine and others have explained that this is a result of humanitarian organisations not having any effective, tried and tested ‘early response’ options to use. (Levine, Crosskey, & Abdinnoor, 2011). The lesson here is that learning requires a syllabus, and there are still many areas of humanitarian action where we do not have enough knowledge to be able to say, confidently, what we should be learning. Groupe URD know this better than anyone, having been at the forefront of building the evidence base in many neglected areas, such as urban response and resilience.

The second reason why knowledge might be ignored is the natural and healthy resistance that organisations show towards change. We often rail against this resistance (why do they keep on doing the same thing? Why don’t they listen?) without realising that organisations require a degree of stability to function, that they require core values and principles, and tested ways of working, to perform effectively. Seen like this, resistance to learning new things (which often comes in the form of ignoring, or failing to notice, new ideas) is quite understandable. If we want learning to take place, we should not make it feel like an attack, but rather show the organisation how this new knowledge will allow it to better deliver on its principles.

The third reason is related to the nature of knowledge in the sector. Much humanitarian knowledge is social in nature. It is not necessarily written down, but exists tacitly within groups and is exchanged through relationships. There is a good argument that the growth of cash programming owes much to the group of people who took it forward, using CalP as a platform. Calls for better response to early warning, or to more contextualised aid, have not benefitted from these social, group platforms, and so have been less successful. Humanitarian learning, it appears, requires not only a syllabus, but also a classroom: a group of people who communicate with one another and are committed to learning together, and a real or virtual space or platform where this group can meet.

Learning can be the basis for deep and lasting improvement in humanitarian practice. But we should not believe learning stops with training, and we should not believe that improvement is easy. It is often said that the first step to changing something is to understand it. Humanitarian organisations are not – thankfully – computers that ‘learn’ by simply downloading a new programme. They are living, social entities, made up of networks of people, with their own cultures, values, aims and fears. When we understand that, we can start to create successful approaches to learning.

*Humanitarian organisations are living, social entities, made up of networks of people, with their own cultures, values, aims and fears. When we understand that, we can start to create successful approaches to learning.*

Paul Knox-Claire, ALNAP Head of Research and Communications

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1. Many humanitarians are concerned about the increased ‘professionalisation’ of the sector: Some are worried that the more technical approach implied by professionalism militates against the values-led ethos of humanitarian action. Others argue that emphasising single, uniform body of knowledge and understanding is not desirable in a sector where context and adaption are so important.
2. See http://www.alnap.org/news-events/annual-meetings
3. See https://dgroups.org/groups/calp/calp-en
5. Such as those offered by Disasterready: http://www.disasterready.org/
6. See http://www.humanitarianleadershipacademy.org/
7. Perhaps they have read Groupe URD’s guidance on participation (2009) or ALNAP’s Closing the loop (Bonino et al. 2014).
9. Traditional humanitarian action is also, of course, a part of this system.
10. We have recently returned to this subject with the paper *Responding to changing needs* (Ramalingam and Mitchell, 2014).
How information management systems can help in the adoption of a Quality approach

Olivier Sarrat

Operational and institutional constraints make it difficult for humanitarian organizations to adopt Quality approaches and principles at the institutional level. However, if information management systems meet a certain number of criteria, they can help to overcome these difficulties, as shown by work done by Groupe URD on the issue of quality, and notably in connection with the Sigmah² project.

Specific difficulties in implementing Quality approaches

In the international aid sector, in contrast to the business sector, Quality is an ethical responsibility for organisations rather than an obligation, because the “clients” – that is to say, the beneficiaries of aid – have very little control over organizations. This specific characteristic explains why the sector finds it so difficult to make progress on the issue of quality.

The diversity and complexity of humanitarian contexts also constitutes a major difficulty. A good project in one context can have disastrous consequences in another context. As such, a specific project needs to be designed for each context, with its specific constraints and opportunities.

There have been many initiatives to improve the quality of aid which have led to the development of standards and “good practices” and the creation of Quality assurance methods, and at the same time an evaluation culture has emerged. However, despite all this, aid organisations still have major difficulty including the principles of a Quality approach in their day-to-day practices. There are a number of reasons for this:

a. The heart of Quality resides in activities in the field, at the project level. It is through contact with the local population that Quality management can have a real impact on the results of a project and allow changes to be made based on the context. And yet, the adoption of a Quality approach necessarily needs to be viewed at the level of the whole organisation in order to allow collective learning, regular results and continuous improvement. There is therefore an issue of centralization in organisations which are extremely decentralized by nature.

b. Field staff are subject to a high level of pressure in terms of workload: they are unable to manage the everyday aspects of their project and also manage a large amount of documentation linked to respecting their organisation’s Quality approach. If Quality management is seen by staff as a substantial dose of extra work, there is a risk that it will be rejected.

c. Humanitarian organizations are extremely diverse. When an organisation adopts a Quality approach, it has to make adjustments because the mechanical application of reference frameworks developed for the sector often leads to failure and risks creating frustration.

d. The majority of humanitarian organisations suffer from too much information which they have difficulty managing – some use the term “infoxication”. And yet, not only can this lack of organisation lead to a loss in efficiency, but the difficulty of finding the right information easily reduces the capacity of organizations to use lessons learned, thus undermining the cycle of continuous improvement which is the basis of all genuine Quality approaches.

The international aid sector therefore needs to overcome the difficulties involved in implementing a formal Quality approach.

Aid organisations still have major difficulty including the principles of a Quality approach in their day-to-day practices.

Strengthening Quality and Accountability (Q&A) principles via an information system

Using an appropriate recording system can remove some of the constraints mentioned above by bringing a new perspective to the issue of information. However, in order to do this, it is necessary to integrate a number of principles based on the knowledge and experience of humanitarian organizations, notably in terms of field constraints.

Recording information and accountability

Quality management systems are traditionally represented by a pyramid with a Quality policy at its peak and project records and information management at its base.
Every Quality approach necessarily involves the recording of activities at the end of the "production line". This involves entering project management information, but it is also important to record decisions and key information from projects in a structured manner so that they can be used at a later stage.

Information about how funds are used has been recorded, organised and secured for a long time in order to produce good quality reports, which are the basis of donor trust.

Today, the issue at stake is therefore to allow key information about activities implemented in the field to be recorded and used. The aim, in the end, is to be able to monitor a certain number of combined indicators based on data collected in the field in order to write reports and steer an organisation, which is the cornerstone of any accountability system.

Consequently, the type of information to monitor should be based on detailed analysis of a certain number of practices; for example, recording disaggregated data is an organisational responsibility promoted by the new Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) in order to guarantee that different communities are taken into account.

Lastly, in order to take into account the specific characteristics of humanitarian organisations, information systems have to be adaptable to the different levels of the organisation, helping project management in the field, and also informing strategy and helping with organisational management at all levels of the hierarchy. They therefore need to have dashboards that present a certain amount of information to inform decision-making at different levels.

Structuring of internal processes and continuous improvement

Each organisation has to think in advance about the structuring of its processes in order to then reproduce these in the parameterisation of its information system. This clarification of internal processes (organizing the main stages of the work carried out by the team and clarifying roles and responsibilities in order to establish a consistent and well thought out way of operating in the organisation) is an essential activity when adopting a Quality approach. It also allows each piece of information recorded to be linked to the principles or criteria of the Quality charter chosen by the organisation.

However, the implementation of a Quality approach is obviously not limited to writing out procedures in order to make the practices within an organisation consistent. The organisation has to engage in an iterative process to continuously improve Quality, regularly reviewing procedures on the basis of the results obtained. The use of the information recorded during project evaluations and the analysis of result indicators should also help to review practices and collective performance. This stimulates discussion and continuous improvement of internal procedures which have to be clarified during the parameterisation.

System flexibility is therefore essential so that it can be adapted to each organisation. Similarly, the ergonomics of interfaces for setting the parameters is essential so that these can evolve easily.

For all these reasons, even though information management software is primarily presented as a technical solution for "infoxication", it is actually capable of much more and can act as an innovative entry point for the effective implementation of Quality and Accountability principles within aid organizations.

This article was adapted from a text that was presented at the "Humanitarian Technology" conference in May 2014 (HumTech2014). The minutes of this event are available at: http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877705814010340.

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Information Systems Engineer

1. www.sigmah.org
Quality management

Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability
Groupe URD, HAP International, People in Aid, The Sphere Project, December 2014, 24 P.

The new Quality reference framework, the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS), places communities and people affected by crises at the centre of humanitarian action. The nine criteria of the standard represent nine different and complementary dimensions of aid Quality that humanitarian actors commit themselves to in order to improve the effectiveness of the assistance they deliver. Each principle has an associated quality criterion and key actions and corresponding organizational elements to help put these characteristics into place. The guide also helps affected communities to understand the ways in which humanitarian actors are accountable to them. This new Humanitarian Standard is the result of extended international consultation which took inspiration from existing standards such as HAP, People in Aid, the Quality COMPAS and Sphere.


Quality in Humanitarian Actions: Thinking Ahead, Key Messages from the Autumn School on Humanitarian Aid 15-17 September 2014,
Groupe URD, ALNAP, November 2014, 8 P.

The ninth edition of Groupe URD’s Autumn School on Humanitarian Aid provided an opportunity to explore Quality and Accountability issues in the sector, review current initiatives, and discuss their potential and limits. This document presents a summary of the review of current initiatives and the key points from the debates. It provides an assessment of the different facets of the issue of quality in the sector.


The Quality COMPAS
Groupe URD, 2005, 59 P.

The Quality COMPAS is the result of a six-year research project on quality issues in the humanitarian sector. The Quality COMPAS is a Quality Assurance method which comes equipped with its own set of tools, training modules and consultancy services. These components have been designed specifically for aid agencies with the overall aim of improving services provided to crisis-affected populations.


Management & organisation

Between chaos and control: Rethinking operational leadership
Paul Knox Clarke, ALNAP, July 2014, 120 P.

This report aims to provide evidence of ‘what works’ in terms of operational leadership – i.e. in terms of the formulation of vision and the development and implementation of strategy. In considering what contributes to effective operational leadership, the author has explicitly considered the roles of the individual leader, the ‘leadership team’ – the senior managers around the leader – and the organisational structures and procedures.

http://www.alnap.org/resource/12671
This ALNAP report analyses the challenges of leadership in humanitarian operations. It identifies the characteristics of three approaches to humanitarian leadership: “exceptional individual”, “structured” and “collaborative” approaches. The author raises the question of the effectiveness of these different approaches and their application during humanitarian operations. On this basis, ALNAP makes recommendations for ways to improve recruitment, training, management of leadership and reducing the pressure on the people in charge of leadership.

http://www.alnap.org/resource/8640

Certification

**Certification Review Project – Summary of key findings and recommendations**

Philip Tamminga, SCHR, October 2014, 9 P.

Between February and June 2014, the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR) tested the main elements of the certification model in four countries (Ethiopia, Pakistan, DRC and the Philippines), with the goal of identifying whether certification can bring added value to the work of the organisation and whether this can be sustainable. This document presents the key findings from the project and makes recommendations for the model.


**Reviewing the Draft Certification Model: A Case Study in Ethiopia**

P. Tamminga, R. Evans, SCHR, March 2014, 38 P.

In mid February, a two-person team travelled to Ethiopia to spend several days with the first of the project's pilot host organisations, the Development and Inter Church Aid Commission of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, (DICAC). The project field research is designed to help us understand the practical implications of certification for organisations, how it could potentially reinforce their own quality and accountability systems and generate more information on how certification can contribute (or not) to improving humanitarian action.


Read the other three case studies for the SCHR project - Pakistan, DRC (Goma), and the Philippines:

http://schr.info/assets/uploads/docs/Philippines_Certification_Case_study_report.pdf

Participatory & collaborative approach

**Missed again: Making space for partnership in the Typhoon Haiyan response**

A. Featherstone, Actionaid, CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam, Tearfund, September 2014, 44 P.

The importance of working together in humanitarian action is now recognized and promoted in every manual and guide in the sector. Putting this into practice is much more difficult. This study returns to the vexed question of humanitarian partnership, focusing on the example of the response to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines. After presenting the context of the humanitarian response (the role of the government, of civil society, NGOs and humanitarian networks), the report analyses the effectiveness of partnerships and the role of national actors in the coordination and financing of the response. In conclusion, the report reasserts the central importance of partnership, past failings and challenges for the future.

http://www.alnap.org/resource/12912
The Participation Handbook for humanitarian field workers contains detailed practical advice on the participation of affected people in humanitarian action. It contains three sections:

. Developing a participatory approach (main issues, key factors, building mutual respect, communication methods and advice on reviewing your approach);
. Implementing your participatory approach at every stage of the project cycle (initial assessment, project design, implementation, monitoring and final evaluation);
. A list of tools and additional resources (books, internet sites, etc.).


**Evaluation & learning**

**Humanitarian Needs Assessment, The Good Enough Guide**
The Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS), The Emergency Capacity Building Project (ECB), December 2014, 121 P.

This guide aims to help humanitarian staff to conduct needs assessments in emergency situations. It is especially aimed at national project managers and their teams. It presents tools which are most directly useful for initial and rapid assessments in the first weeks of an emergency, but the principles and practices described apply at any stage in the response. It is organized into three sections: the different steps of the evaluation cycle, the tools related to these specific activities and bibliographical resources.


**Insufficient Evidence? The quality and use of evidence in humanitarian action**
Paul Knox Clarke, James Darcy, ALNAP, February 2014, 92 P.

Lack of evidence makes humanitarian action less effective, less ethical and less accountable. Yet the debate around evidence in the humanitarian sector is only starting. What is evidence and what do we need it for? How good is the evidence that is currently available? How can we improve the quality and use of evidence? Does evidence get used by decision-makers? In “Insufficient evidence?”, ALNAP looked into these questions and identified six criteria to judge the quality of evidence that is generated and used in humanitarian action.

http://www.alnap.org/resource/10441.aspx

**Quality from donors'point of view**

**Imagining more effective humanitarian aid: A donor perspective**

On face value, the humanitarian system contains all the necessary assets for delivering an effective response, but it is not yet producing consistent, optimal results. This paper is intended to provoke debate, and stimulate further thinking and study, about humanitarian effectiveness, and what this will mean for donors and other stakeholders, in the run-up to the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. The eleven donors interviewed for this study are broadly aligned on what factors are important for humanitarian effectiveness, and on what needs to be done to improve quality. The main recommendation of this study is to seize the opportunity of the 2016 Summit to establish a common framework for humanitarian effectiveness.


Consult the full bibliography on the Groupe URD website:
http://www.urd.org/Bibliography-on-Quality-of-Aid
Events

Groupe URD professional training courses
- The Participation of Crisis-affected People in Humanitarian Action, 27-30 April, Plaisians (France, 26 170)
- Evaluating the Quality of Humanitarian Action, 12-16 October, Plaisians (France, 26 170)
Information and registration: Anna Lear (alear@urd.org)

Conference “Lessons from the response to Mali’s interconnected crises”, 7 May, Geneva (Switzerland)
This conference, which is being organised by CERAH and Groupe URD, will present a range of different studies on the Sahelian crisis, and representatives of international organizations operating in the field will discuss the results of the humanitarian response in the Sahel so far and challenges for the future.
For more information: cerahcommunication@unige.ch

World Water Forum, 12-17 April 2015, Daegu Gyeongbuk – South Korea
Every three years, the World Water Forum mobilizes creativity, innovation, and know-how around water. Serving as a stepping-stone towards global collaboration on water challenges, the Forum is a unique multi-stakeholder platform where the water community and the policy and decision makers from all regions of the world can work together to find joint solutions. It is the largest international event which seeks to advance the cause of water.
http://eng.worldwaterforum7.org/main/

ICT4D 2015, 27-29 May 2015 - Chicago (Illinois, USA)
This year’s conference will bring together thought leaders and experienced professionals from around the world to share and explore methods for systematically integrating information and communications technology innovations into relief and development programs – innovations that enhance program quality, improve decision making, and increase impact.
http://www.ict4dconference.crs.org/

Global Forum on Improving Humanitarian Action, 4-5 June 2015 - New York, NY (USA)
Organised by ALNAP, the WHS Secretariat and USAID. The event will review the parameters of and challenges to the effectiveness of humanitarian action and present several key propositions for change and improvement.
http://www.alnap.org/what-we-do/effectiveness/global-forum

The Environmental Emergencies Forum (EEF), 5-7 June 2015 - Oslo, Norway
The Environmental Emergencies Forum (EEF) is a biennial global meeting that brings together stakeholders from around the world to improve preparedness, response and overall resilience to environmental emergencies. The Forum provides a unique opportunity to create partnerships, to improve, international governance, share experiences and build capacity.

Resilient cities 2015: Sixth global forum on urban resilience and adaptation, 8-10 June 2015 Bonn, Germany
Resilient Cities - The Annual Global Forum on Urban Resilience and Adaptation - is the global platform for urban resilience and climate change adaptation, hosted every year in Bonn. Resilient Cities was first launched in 2010 with the goal of connecting local government leaders and climate change adaptation experts to discuss adaptation challenges facing urban environments around the globe and forging partnerships that could have lasting impacts for cities. Five successful editions have made this goal a reality. The 6th edition of the Resilient Cities congress series will take place June 8-10, 2015 in Bonn, Germany. The call for contributions for the 2015 congress is open and welcomes proposals for presentations, panels, workshops, posters, trainings, and co-events.
http://resilientcities2015.iclei.org/
Désertifactions 2015, 10-13 June 2015, Montpellier (France)
Désertifactions is an international forum of civil society organisations involved in combating desertification and land degradation. More than 300 international development organizations will be present to discuss and establish joint positioning on land degradation, combating desertification, climate change and its consequences both in the north and the south. http://www.desertif-actions.fr/fr/

6th Forum de l’action internationale des collectivités – Cités Unies France, 29-30 June 2015, Paris (France)
Organised by Cités Unies France, the sixth edition of the Forum de l’action internationale des collectivités is a unique opportunity to promote cooperation between local and regional governments. The Assises européennes de la coopération décentralisée will take place on 1-2 June in Brussels
http://www.cites-unies-france.org/6e-Forum-de-l-action

The Third International Conference on Financing for Development will be held in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia to define the role of global partnerships and funds, such as the Global Partnership for Education, and ways of financing sustainable development objectives.

Reconstruction and recovery in urban contexts, 6-8 July 2015 – London, United Kingdom
This conference seeks to understand how urban contexts shape disaster recovery and to look at how reconstruction and recovery activities can enhance the functioning of cities. The conference seeks to push the boundaries of knowledge on reconstruction and develop new areas of inquiry that help to solve the complex problems faced in urban areas. The conference is expressly designed to bring researchers and practitioners together to collaborate together in moving this critical issue forwards, and in bringing it to the attention of decision makers faced with the realities of post-disaster organization and action.
https://www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/dpu/i-rec

Convergences World Forum 2015, 7-9 September, Paris (France)
The 8th edition of the Convergences World Forum will be marked by the new global commitments to development to be determined in 2015. The new objectives for sustainable development will be submitted to the United Nations for approval and the 21st Climate Conference (COP21) will be held in Paris in December. The Convergences World Forum will be an opportunity to debate, find inspiration and collectively work towards innovative solutions for the future.

World Humanitarian Summit (WHS)
Numerous events are being held throughout the year and up till May 2016 when the World Humanitarian Summit takes place. A list of these events can be found at:https://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/whs_timeline.
For more information about thematic and regional consultations:https://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/sitemap

A large number of international conferences on climate change and sustainable development are being held this year, such as:
- 9th Conference on community-based adaptation to climate change, 24-30 April 2015 in Nairobi, Kenya
- South Asian Conference on Climate Change: Risks & Actions, 28-30 April 2015 in Jamshoro, Pakistan
- Australian and New Zealand disaster and emergency management conference, 3-5 May 2015 in Broadbeach QLD, Australia
- High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, 26 June - 8 July 2015 in New York, USA
Groupe URD

Groupe URD (Urgence – Réhabilitation – Développement) is a non-profit research, evaluation and training institute. Its main objective is to help improve humanitarian practices in favour of crisis-affected people.

Further information:
www.urd.org

Humanitarian Aid on the move

Humanitarian Aid on the move - a bilingual biannual review – aims to share the results of work on important issues currently facing the sector. We regularly invite external contributors and provide links to other publications. To propose an article, contact Jeanne Taisson: jtaisson@urd.org

Further reading on certain topics and full articles by the authors can be found on the Groupe URD website:
www.urd.org/Humanitarian-Aid-on-the-move

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To Sign up for the online version:
www.urd.org/Humanitarian-Aid-on-the-move

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