GROUPE URD

Learning and innovating to improve crisis response

Created in 1993, Groupe URD is an independent institute which specializes in the analysis of practices and the development of policy for the humanitarian and post-crisis sectors. Its role is to help organizations to improve the quality of their programmes through evaluations, research and training.

In order to work close to field realities and to share lessons, Groupe URD has established several observatories of aid practices - currently in Haiti, and formerly in Chad and in Afghanistan.

As an independent observer, we have a global and cross-sector vision which allows us to develop strategic analysis of emergency and post-emergency contexts. This specific quality means we are in a position to make proposals and develop innovative tools for the humanitarian sector. As an internationally recognized think tank, we provide strategic advice to operational and policy-oriented organizations (United Nations agencies, donors, Red Cross institutions, NGOs, etc.).

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Summary

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Claire Pirotte: Twenty years ago the world was going through profound change. There were hopes of peace with the end of the Cold War. Groupe URD was created in connection with debates about the links between emergency relief and development in this new political configuration. Initially we were a network of actors who discussed the world that was coming. Very quickly, the crises which had been stifled by the Cold War exploded: ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, civil war in Somalia, Afghanistan and the Caucasus, and genocide in the region of the Great Lakes. Conflict dynamics were evolving and donors began to invest enormous amounts in humanitarian aid which was both freed of the East-West agenda and was very useful for covering up the inability to tackle these new problems, or the lack of political courage to do so. As a result, we felt it was necessary to think collectively about this new state of affairs so that we did not end up being overwhelmed by the situation.

François Grünewald: Faced with these many different challenges, it became necessary to change from being a simple discussion network to an organisation which was able to “play with the big boys” in the world of ideas. We defined an operational strategy in terms of research, evaluation, analysis and methodological production. And we built a team which was internationally recognised for its ability to think “out of the box”, while remaining very close to the field, with the aim of making the sector more effective, more relevant and more creative.

Claire Pirotte: 2013, our 20th anniversary, reflected this history, and in the face of a changing world, we have tried to remain as innovative as we were at the beginning. The majority of our pioneering subjects are still relevant today: LRRD and resilience; Civil-Military relations; the role of the local population and institutions; humanitarian practices in urban contexts; the environmental footprint of aid; and particularly, issues of quality and improving evaluation and learning mechanisms. We are still agitators when it comes to questioning dogma, such as the power of medical epidemiology over social sciences, of standards over “situational intelligence” or of the totalitarianism of relief over the need to reflect and understand...

François Grünewald: Other challenges have continued to knock at the door of the "Fontaine des Marins", our eagle’s nest opposite the Mont Ventoux. On the one hand, there is what we might call the “post 9/11” world, with the Total War on Terror, and conflicts between fundamentalisms of all kinds, such as in Mali. And on the other hand, there is the question of how to manage major disasters more effectively. Once, when I was asked to describe Groupe URD, the image of a bridge came to mind: a bridge between action and reflection; between French-speakers, English-speakers and Spanish-speakers; between NGOs, UN agencies and the international Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement; between humanitarians and the military; between State actors and civil society; and between hard sciences and social sciences. Being 20 years old means that we are no longer in our infancy, nor even our adolescence, but we still want to live life to the full, balanced on the tight rope between institutionalization and freedom of thought. Our motivations have remained the same in 2013 – making the world a better place, making international aid a little more relevant and increasing solidarity.
In 2013 Groupe URD celebrated its 20th anniversary!

Groupe URD has been present in the field of crises and the field of ideas for 20 years. Through thick and thin, we have shown that our approach is pertinent and that our role as an independent observer is important to improve practices, in a context of multiple and complex crises.

To celebrate its 20th anniversary, a two-day conference was organised on 30 and 31 May at the association’s headquarters in the Drôme Provençale area, during which almost 80 participants discussed the current issues affecting humanitarian aid. Representatives of NGOs, of the French and German state and of the European Commission, researchers, representatives of United Nations agencies, etc. all discussed the same difficulties encountered in crisis contexts and looked for ways to make improvements in the future. In the tradition of the Autumn School on Humanitarian Aid, discussions were frank and in-depth, and the event was both festive and serious. It ended with an anniversary party for Groupe URD attended by many of the structure’s partners, collaborators and friends from the past. All those who had been part of the team in the past, whether employees, interns or volunteers, were invited to the event.

2013 was also an opportunity to do a complete review of Groupe URD’s 20 years of activity and to look back over the history of the organisation. This introspective work led to a quantitative review by type of activity, geographical region and area of expertise and an overview of how the life of the association had evolved. During the anniversary, Groupe URD conducted a number of interviews with people who, on different levels and at different times, played an important part in the development of the organisation.

“I think Groupe URD is very important for the humanitarian community. They represent something very special […] Groupe URD’s approach comes across in the way they do everything; they understand the voices of the people, and the importance of participation. It’s not just rhetoric with them, they actually apply it in the field”.
John Mitchell, Director of ALNAP

“Groupe URD’s independence allows it to act as an intellectual Thom in the side of the sector, and allows it to express novel and creative opinions, and thus question certain practices which continue purely out of habit” Remi Russbach, Head Physician of the ICRC, from 1977 to 1994, who is currently a member of Groupe URD’s Administrative Board

“One of Groupe URD’s contributions is as a “vigilant agitator”, capable of mobilising and influencing, and which is devoted to analysing how the international aid sector evolves (…). Of course, being visionary does not guarantee success, but over time Groupe URD has established itself as a key player which combines academic ambition and operational pragmatism”
Jean-Baptiste Richardier, Director General and co-founder of Handicap International

“Groupe URD is a reference in the field of evaluation and the production of methodological tools (…). Their ideas are rooted in knowledge of the realities and practices of actors in the field (…). Groupe URD has made a significant contribution to debates about LRRD”
Laurent Thomas, Assistant Director General of the FAO, in charge of the Technical Cooperation Department
Carbon footprint

Following a request by several members of the association which was then validated by the Board, Groupe URD decided to evaluate its greenhouse gas emissions during 2012. The objective of this activity is to establish ways to reduce the organisation’s carbon footprint.

During 2013, several members of staff collected data to establish a reliable estimate of our greenhouse gas emissions. They tested and shared tools for this purpose and raised awareness internally and externally about this activity. We identified ways to reduce our emissions and drew up an action plan which will be implemented from 2014.

The calculation of greenhouse gas emissions included all the activities of Groupe URD’s offices (headquarters, Paris office, Observatory – first Chad, then Haiti during the course of the year) for 2012, both in France and abroad, and travel by participants in the training courses and events organised by the organisation. The methodology which we used was developed by the GERES. Calculations are based on average emission factors as predefined by the association, Bilan Carbone.

Groupe URD, a think tank serving the humanitarian community

Since January 2012, Groupe URD has been coordinating the activities of the INSPIRE Consortium, which was specially created with GPPi (the Global Public Policy Institute) and IECAH (Instituto de Estudios Sobre Conflictos y Accion Humanitaria) to provide the European Commission (DG ECHO) with support in developing and disseminating its humanitarian policies.

In 2013, a large number of training courses were conducted in the cities where DG ECHO has regional offices (Dakar, Amman, New Delhi, Managua, Nairobi and Bangkok) and in Brussels. The Consortium contributed to the drafting of policies (Health and Water and Sanitation), the design of guidance tools (gender markers) and research and lesson learning activities (Civil-Military relations and Nutrition).

In December 2013, DG ECHO asked the Consortium to carry out a study of LRRD in the Central African Republic. This very interesting work mapping the context led to an analysis report and a matrix of current and future operations. The Consortium made proposals to DG ECHO and DEVCO for activities to be implemented from the beginning of 2014.

This work is similar to the studies and activities conducted for the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Centre de Crise. In addition to providing the commissioning body with very operational support, it allows Groupe URD to develop contextualized expertise which we can then integrate into our different activities to the benefit of the sector as a whole and the different actors working alongside crisis-affected people.

Increasing debate in the field

For a number of years, Groupe URD has sought to increase the number of conferences and workshops in the field. Our commitment to creating events of this kind to encourage dialogue between professionals, create networks or explore evaluation results in greater depth led to the organisation of events in Chad, Senegal and Haiti. In parallel, Groupe URD continues to take part in numerous international conferences and continues to organize events in France and in Europe.
JANUARY 01

Groupe URD was invited to the 13th National Conference on Science, Policy and the Environment in Washington, a major event on these issues, where we spoke about disaster preparedness and management, and more generally about environmental disasters.

FEBRUARY 02

Little more than a month after the beginning of the military intervention in Mali, the Centre de Crise commissioned Groupe URD to carry out an initial assessment and identify how needs might evolve there in order to consider how the aid agenda might need to be re-orientated.

MARCH 03

Groupe URD took part in the biannual meeting in Washington organized by ALNAP, the network which specialises in issues of quality and accountability for the humanitarian sector. ALNAP has been an important partner for us for many years, having worked together since the network was created in 1997, with the evaluation of the humanitarian response to hurricane Mitch.

APRIL 04

A new office was opened in the "Cité de la Solidarité Internationale" in Annemasse, taking the number of Groupe URD offices to four, with Plaisians, Paris and Port-au-Prince.

MAY 05

The World Bank organised a working group on reconstruction in Haiti which brought together urban planners, social economy organisations, donors, Haitian organizations, etc. Groupe URD was invited to share its knowledge and understanding of the context having worked continuously for a year and a half in the country via the Haiti Observatory.

JUNE 06

As part of its mandate to provide aid organizations with support, Groupe URD took part in a meeting of international cluster coordinators and a IASC weekly meeting in order to present its work on the environmental impact of humanitarian aid, the aim being to raise awareness about the importance of these issues within the sector and to share the tools that have been developed.
DATES

JULY 07
Groupe URD conducted a study for the Red Cross Movement, to support them in their reflections on internal coordination mechanisms, which is a complex issue due to the size of the Movement. After a field visit to Mali in July, we drew up a global report, which included case studies in Syria, Haiti, the Philippines and Mali.

AUGUST 08
As usual, Groupe URD organised a week-long staff meeting involving all the offices. During the meeting we discussed our operational strategy for 2015-2020. This was followed by the 2013 General Assembly which was an opportunity to review the last 20 years of the association along with members of the Board who have been involved with Groupe URD for many years, some since the beginning.

SEPTEMBER 09
Groupe URD co-organised a one-day workshop on humanitarian certification with the humanitarian commission of Coordination Sud. This event brought together representatives of French humanitarian organizations to discuss recent international developments and to consider how they might position themselves on this issue.

OCTOBER 10
Swiss Solidarity and Groupe URD organized a conference entitled “In Search of a Sustainable Post-Emergency Phase” in Port-au-Prince to discuss and share lessons and ideas about NGO programmes funded by Swiss Solidarity’s Haiti Earthquake Fund.

NOVEMBER 11
November marked the operational launch of phase 2 of the Sigmah project (2013-2015). This new phase of the collective project will make it possible to develop key functionalities, such as the offline mode, and encourage more organisations to adopt this open source project management software which has been designed specifically to meet the needs of international aid organizations.

DECEMBER 12
TRENDS IN 2013 BY TYPE OF ACTIVITY

● EVALUATION
Groupe URD has gained in recognition internationally in the humanitarian evaluation sector. This is evident from the growing number of large-scale evaluations that we have carried out, with longer timescales and larger geographical, and involving more complex themes. This trend was confirmed in 2013, a year in which all the evaluations focused on multi-project and multi-actor programmes, strategies and processes (real-time initial assessments, humanitarian responses to crises, monitoring systems, etc.). Whenever it is possible, Groupe URD tends to propose to carry out iterative evaluations, which are dynamic evaluation and support processes that aim to improve practices in changing contexts. Iterative evaluations are made up of a series of evaluations which are conducted at pivotal phases of a programme so that it can be adapted to changes in the context, allow better knowledge management and use of lessons learned, and ensure that the programme is of good quality. It also should be noted that many of this year’s evaluations were concentrated in Haiti.

● RESEARCH
Groupe URD's operational research and strategic orientation capacities were put to greater use this year, as shown by the greater number of studies commissioned by donors (ECHO, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, French Development Agency, GHDI), the IASC and operational organisations (International Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent). The studies in 2013 focused either on strategies (e.g. possible programmes in CAR and Mali), cross-cutting issues (e.g. resilience, environment or security) or operational methods (e.g. operations in urban contexts and disaster prevention mechanisms).

The Haiti Observatory produced a series of studies which were well received. Groupe URD continues to invest to help develop the analysis of important subjects like the quality of aid or its environmental impact.

● TRAINING
In 2013, Groupe URD diversified its training courses in terms of locations, languages, duration, public and topics. New training course modules were created and some older ones were remodelled, notably on the Environment, Quality, Protection and Resilience. Our flagship course on Evaluation was updated by integrating new tools such as the latest ALNAP guide. We continue to want to increase the number of training courses in the field, as we did for a long time in Afghanistan, but this is often difficult to put into practice if there are no support structures in place. Another important issue in 2013 was the fact that we were unfortunately obliged to end most of our university partnerships due to administrative barriers.

● ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT
Though Groupe URD's Quality support department looks as if it is running out of steam, this is due to the fact that projects have not necessarily fitted neatly into this category in the same way they have in the past. Though large-scale projects have punctuated Groupe URD’s development and its international position on key subjects linked to Quality, there were no projects in 2013 specifically concerned with accompanying the adoption of quality approaches. But in reality, more and more studies and evaluations include methodological support and the development of tools. Groupe URD is also still very involved in international debates, notably on certification and the question of humanitarian standards, and the development of the Sigmah open source software.
MAIN THEMES & GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS

2013

ON THE MOVE
The Environment is an extremely broad, cross-cutting issue. As a result, it is often difficult to know how to approach it. At Groupe URD, we address it from the angle of reducing the environmental impact of crisis responses. This raises both institutional and operational issues and is part of a Quality and Accountability approach. The interaction between the environment and crises are dealt with in many of our research activities, training modules, evaluations and methodological support activities.

2013 was marked by a return to research activities on the Environment. This included both operational research (“Reconstruction and the environment in the metropolitan region of Port-au-Prince”) and more structural research (study of donor strategies and practices vis-à-vis the environment which began at the end of the year).

Having been involved in knowledge management in recent years with our key partner, UNEP, we have now entered a phase of knowledge dissemination in order to increase awareness throughout the sector. We were regularly solicited to share our tools and expertise on integrating the environment in the humanitarian sector as part of a Quality approach. We took part in numerous events, such as the Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies conference 2013, and international coordination meetings, such as the international cluster coordinators meeting, and a IASC meeting in June.

The Humanitarian Environment Network was created in 2012 at the initiative of Groupe URD and several other organizations. Other than the sharing of experiences, this network aims to conduct advocacy work to promote the integration of environmental considerations within humanitarian organizations and to discuss appropriate tools to meet the needs of the sector. During 2013, the network grew and increased its internal and external activity. Groupe URD is also in contact with international organizations as a member of another network led by the UNEP/OCHA Joint Environment Unit (JEU) which is also dedicated to this subject.

The second issue of our review, Humanitarian Aid on the Move, in 2013, was a special issue on the Environment which was prepared in close collaboration with the members of the Humanitarian Environment Network. It helped to establish new partnerships and to approach the issue of the environment from different angles.

Finally, two training sessions on the Environment were carried out in Afghanistan in partnership with the Afghan organisation, ACBAR. Another training course in Geneva, carried out in partnership with the JEU, brought together a variety of participants from United Nations agencies, coordination platforms, research bodies and NGOs.

In order to increase awareness about environmental considerations, Groupe URD shares its tools and expertise on integrating the environment in the humanitarian sector as part of a quality and accountability approach.
AID IN URBAN CONTEXTS

The analysis of humanitarian and reconstruction aid in urban contexts has become a central preoccupation of aid organizations. Groupe URD took an early interest in this area of research and we have conducted a great deal of research and published 3 books on the subject. It is one of the main areas of research of the Haiti Observatory.

In 2013, there was general recognition within the international aid sector of the specific nature and difficulties of conducting operations in urban contexts. Certain risks linked to cities clearly emerged during the post-earthquake reconstruction process in Haiti. Groupe URD has focused on these issues since opening its Haiti Observatory. Urban reconstruction involves complex and multi-dimensional processes and relatively long timeframes which mean that working on these issues often takes time and involves numerous actors in contexts with changing dynamics. All the evaluations carried out in 2013 were iterative processes, in which the objective was to analyse how reconstruction programmes were evolving and how relevant they were to changes in the context and local policies. These included: the evaluation of the Support Programme for Housing and Neighbourhoods for UN-Habitat; the evaluation of the integrated reconstruction and urban and economic development project for Christ-Roi neighbourhood in Port-au-Prince; and the evaluation of projects funded by Swiss Solidarity following the earthquake. These evaluations helped to establish a complete and complementary picture by studying different scales and operational areas, including the individual house, the neighbourhood and the city.

Studies were also carried out in Haiti, one on technical and property rights aspects of the reconstruction and the other on cash-based approaches in urban contexts for the British Red Cross which also included a case study conducted in parallel in Nepal.

Groupe URD also took part in a number of conferences on the subject, and organized, in partnership with the French Development Agency, the conference, “Cities and crises: intervention and anticipation strategies” in Paris in April. This event brought together urban planners, urban development professionals and institutional and operational actors from the development and humanitarian sectors. It confirmed the need for exchange between humanitarian actors and other urban actors.

Articles were published in “Humanitarian Exchange Magazine” and “Urbanités”, and in the collective book, “War: Global assessment, public attitudes and psychological effects”.

At the end of the year, Groupe URD took part in a working group set up by the association CRAterre in order to establish a reference framework and criteria for the construction of sustainable, quality housing. Groupe URD represents post-crisis issues in the working group.

All the evaluations carried out in 2013 were iterative processes in which the objective was to analyse how urban reconstruction and rehousing programmes were evolving and whether they were adapted to changes in the context and local policies.
Groupe URD has always focused on the different phases of crisis management, the operational difficulties involved and the improvements that can be made. Linking relief and development (LRRD) is not only a topic in its own right but also a cross-cutting theme which runs through all our work. Groupe URD’s name (URD stands for ‘relief, rehabilitation and development’) is testament to the importance of this subject for us.

The links between humanitarian, reconstruction and development phases, operations and actors is now recognised as being a fundamentally important part of managing humanitarian crises following disasters or conflicts. This importance is evident, notably for donors, in certain major evaluations that Groupe URD has carried out.

In 2013, Groupe URD finished two iterative evaluations, both of which focused on transition projects: iterative evaluation of the LRRD-REPI programme (community recovery following the July 2010 floods in the Centre Nord and Est regions of Burkina Faso) for the EU delegation in Burkina Faso (2011-2013); and the evaluation of the Stabilisation Support Programme (PAS) in East Chad for AFD (2011-2013). These two programmes aimed to reinforce the capacity of the population in the short and medium-term to make them more resilient to potential future crises, in different sectors (Health, Agriculture, Water and Sanitation, etc.). The evaluations ended with workshops to share lessons learned and discuss the recommendations with local actors, in Ouagadougou and N’Djamena. A video was produced as part of the REPI project evaluation. It highlights the difficulties and issues involved in relation to LRRD with concrete examples from this project.

These two programmes aimed to reinforce the capacity of the population in the short and medium-term.

Groupe URD was also invited by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ Policy and Operations Evaluation Department to take part in a meeting of experts on linking relief and development, in connection with broader reflection about Dutch humanitarian aid. We also facilitated a one-day workshop on LRRD for TDH-Lausanne.

Through the INSPIRE Consortium, Groupe URD was approached by ECHO and DEVCO in connection with the development of an operational strategy which allows current humanitarian needs to be met while guaranteeing LRRD for future programming in the Central African Republic. Groupe URD therefore mapped the humanitarian and development projects being carried out in the country, in order to consider strategies to ensure that the crisis-affected population had access to basic services and that these could continue in the medium term. A focus was carried out of 5 sectors: Aid to displaced people, Food Security, Health, WASH and Education.
Groupe URD was created with the aim of questioning humanitarian practices. Very quickly, we became interested in issues of aid quality. A four-year project analysing different types of crises, contexts and operational sectors led, in 2004, to the development of the Quality COMPAS, a Quality assurance method designed specifically for the humanitarian sector. Since then, Groupe URD has been providing organisations with support through the development of new tools and organisational support.

In 2013 there was a return to the international debate about issues of quality and accountability centred on the development of norms and certification processes for the sector. For more than ten years, Groupe URD has promoted a particular approach to Quality, a complex subject which means that practices change slowly. We therefore followed the developments in 2013 very closely, by being actively involved in the technical committee for the Core Humanitarian Standard, by taking part in a variety of events such as the Humanitarian Standards Forum in Geneva in June, and in the activities of the Quality and Accountability group, of which we have been a member since 2005. In France, Groupe URD initiated several meetings which were co-organised with Coordination Sud, to raise awareness amongst French organizations and try to establish a collective position, with a view to becoming involved in these global discussions which could have a major impact on aid in the future.

In more operational terms, Groupe URD is very focused on the links between managing the Quality of projects and institutional processes for adopting a quality approach. The open source software, Sigmah, which has been developed since 2008 in partnership with ten French NGOs, and a community of software developers, testers and users, can help to implement these ideas in concrete terms. These issues also have a central place in the Quality training courses run by Groupe URD, which are sometimes designed specifically to meet the needs of an organisation, as was the case for Handicap International in 2013.

In addition, this view of Quality was incorporated in several studies, such as the study on internal coordination at the International Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, which aimed to improve internal processes, and the study for the IFRC in Haiti, which led to the development of a socio-cultural evaluation tool for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene programmes, which can be applied in any type of context.
RESILIENCE & RISK REDUCTION

Rather than talking of vulnerability and its negative connotations, the notion of resilience underlines the capacity of individuals, communities, societies and institutions to adapt and quickly recuperate after constraints and shocks. Groupe URD was already working with the concept of resilience in the mid 90s in terms of survival strategies, but it has now become a mainstream idea. Groupe URD continues to play a central role in these discussions, notably in terms of operational issues. This concept is also directly linked to issues of disaster risk reduction.

Groupe URD is recognised internationally as an expert on the subject of resilience. It conducted workshops and presented its findings to organizations such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) in New York and the United Nations team in Senegal, and took part in the debates which preceded the elaboration of the European Commission’s Resilience action plan. It was also commissioned by the IASC, the UN inter-agency coordination mechanism, to look into the issue of resilience in aid architecture, and more concretely, integrating resilience in humanitarian policy. We were active in the Resilience working group set up by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ Directorate-General for Globalisation alongside the main French NGOs. We also provided Handicap International with support in developing its programming between the Relief and Development departments in order to integrate the concept more in certain geographical areas.

The Resilience research project ended at the beginning of 2013. This project studied the interactions between climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction strategies and poverty reduction policies. Groupe URD ran this project with the University of Wageningen and CARE Netherlands for three years. New tools were created for aid professionals (a handbook, an awareness-raising / information sharing educational game, a website and videos). At the end of the project, in February 2013, Groupe URD organized an exchange workshop in Dakar: “Resilience: from the general concept to the specific characteristics of the Sahel” which brought together around sixty participants from the sub-region. Following on from this event, Groupe URD facilitated a workshop entitled, “Exchange of Practices and Lessons Learnt on Resilience Building in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel Regions”, in Dakar in July.

With a view to sharing knowledge on the subject, we took part in a large number of international events, such as the international conference on humanitarian research during which we facilitated the session, “Building resilience: opportunities and approaches for a coherent response”.

The eleventh edition of the review “Humanitarian aid on the move” was entirely dedicated to the topic of resilience, in the form of a review of the 8th Autumn School on Humanitarian Aid which took place on October 2012 at Groupe URD headquarters.

The way crises are evolving means that resilience and risk reduction are central preoccupations of aid organisations. In 2013, Groupe URD established itself as an expert on the subject of resilience.
Disaster risk reduction is also an integral part of building the resilience of populations and societies. As part of the INSPIRE Consortium, Groupe URD provided the European Commission with support in preparing its disaster risk reduction strategy and policy. We also contributed to strategic reflection on preparing the first responders to disasters – that is to say, the population, local civil protection bodies and Red Cross structures – in connection with a study of the response to natural disasters in the Indian Ocean area.

This work focused on the exceptional procedures which should be put in place in the event of a major natural disaster, in order to establish a regional multi-country relief response. Groupe URD also took part in several conferences in France and abroad on the subject.

FOOD SECURITY AND WASH

Food Security and the WASH sector are two of Groupe URD’s areas of expertise which are increasingly viewed from a cross-sector and multi-sector perspective or from a resilience angle.

However, there were several activities which were specifically dedicated to these issues, such as: the evaluation of the emergency response by Oxfam USA and its partners in Senegal and Gambia following the food crisis of 2012; a study in Haiti on the impact of cash-based interventions supported by the WFP in response to problems of food insecurity; the design of a socio-cultural evaluation tool for WASH programmes for the IFRC; and a workshop on “maternal nutrition in emergency situations”, which was co-organised in connection with the INSPIRE Consortium. Groupe URD is also part of the humanitarian working group in the French Water Partnership.

NICT, A KEY CHALLENGE FOR THE FUTURE

New Information and Communication Technologies (NICTs) have revolutionized all fields, including humanitarian aid. In recent years we have been increasingly interested in how these can be used in areas such as crisis management, the provision of aid, prevention, information exchange and relations with local people. We feel that this paradigm change and these innovations are key factors which will have a major impact on the sector.

An example of our investment in these issues is the facilitation of the Sigmah project, which Groupe URD has been co-running since 2008, and which aims to make all internal information management processes easier in order to improve the quality of aid. Groupe URD was also involved in the EUROSHA pilot project – and its evaluation which was carried out in 2013 – which aims to strengthen humanitarian aid through the establishment of a European volunteer corps specialized in IT services and tools.

In order to keep a close eye on these developments, and to inform aid organisations about them, our information systems specialist monitors the sector, is involved in international networks, takes part in conferences in France and abroad, and disseminates information via articles. During the two day conference which was organized to celebrate Groupe URD’s twentieth anniversary, we felt it was important to put these issues on the agenda and to provide a discussion point on “Innovations brought by new
HAITI Since January 2012, Groupe URD has been running an Observatory of humanitarian and reconstruction practices in Haiti specifically focused on supporting evaluation. It has three strategic areas of activity: reinforcing national capacities in programme evaluation; promoting, analyzing, sharing and discussing the main lessons learned from evaluations; and exploring in greater detail certain issues which have emerged from evaluations. Its role is to help the aid community, humanitarian and development organizations, and national organizations to learn better from crises and past experience, and also to encourage changes in aid practices.

The existence of an Observatory in Haiti makes it possible to carry out activities close to field realities, provide training which is tailored to the needs of the moment and the context, and to provide support in the medium term. Groupe URD is unusual in having a global view situated between operational activities and academic work. It is at the interface between worlds that do not interact much (NGOs, UN agencies, donors, Haitian public institutions, academics, etc.), giving it a special position and a decompartmentalised vision.

This position provides a certain level of neutrality in the choice of subjects which are dealt with, but also makes it possible to bring together opposing opinions and encourage debate. An example of this in 2013 was the study, “Insecurity and humanitarian aid: an impossible dialogue? Analysis of humanitarian organisations’ security policies in metropolitan Port-au-Prince”. The study addressed this issue without taboos and engendered a certain amount of controversy. This is a sensitive subject, notably in Haiti, as perceptions of insecurity vary a great deal from one actor to another, a factor which has a great deal of impact on projects. A workshop was organized following the publishing of the study so that the subject could be discussed in greater detail.

The study, “Reconstruction and Environment in the metropolitan region of Port-au-Prince” also ended in 2013 with the Brustout-Bobin case study. The objective of this work was to study the effects of the national reconstruction strategy on the environment. Another study was carried out in Haiti in 2013 for the British Red Cross to draw lessons from programmes carried out in urban environments, notably cash-based approaches, which was also conducted in Nepal.

More generally, Groupe URD is also regularly solicited by evaluators and other reconstruction and development organizations for contextual analysis and provides support for the implementation of evaluations. We are a source of information on different subjects, with specialized expertise notably in urban reconstruction.

Three iterative evaluations of note in 2013 focused on urban areas: the evaluation of projects funded by Swiss Solidarity focused on housing and rehousing; the evaluation of the reconstruction and urban and economic development project in the neighbourhood of Christ-Roi for Solidarités International looked at the neighbourhood level; and the evaluation of the Support Programme for the Reconstruction of Housing and Neighbourhoods in Haiti for UN-Habitat dealt more globally with the implementation of a programme in an urban environment at the city level.
In terms of methodological support, the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) commissioned Groupe URD to develop a socio-cultural evaluation tool for WASH programmes. The appropriation by the population of the infrastructures put in place, whether in Haiti or elsewhere, is often complicated. This question is closely related to socio-anthropological aspects. A better grasp of the socio-cultural issues which underlie relations to hygiene, sanitation and water helps to improve understanding of how to interact with the population and to implement more appropriate projects in this domain.

Another piece of work was conducted for the World Food Programme which implemented a lot of Cash for Assets programmes following cyclone Sandy and wanted to establish a monitoring system for these programmes. Groupe URD contributed to the development of appropriate tools, carried out a mid-term evaluation and trained local staff.

In order to ensure that it reaches a wide audience, the Haiti Observatory monitors relevant literature and compiles a database of bibliographical references related to its areas of work on its website. It also publishes the Haiti Observatory Newsletter in order to inform actors and help them share evaluation results and recommendations.

The year ended with a training session on the evaluation of humanitarian projects in Port-au-Prince. As there was very high demand, the objective for 2014 is to do more of these courses and also run training of trainers in order to establish a pool of Haitian evaluators.

SAHEL  Groupe URD wanted to open a Sahel Observatory as early as 2007, to monitor humanitarian needs and programmes in the area. As a result of our interest in the region, we supported ALNAP and OCHA in organising the 22nd ALNAP biannual conference in Dakar on complex crises in the Sahel. The Observatory project finally came to fruition with the creation of the Chad Observatory, from 2009 to 2012. Since then we have remained present in the Sahel, via evaluations in several countries and a particular focus on the Malian crisis.

Groupe URD was solicited a great deal to help humanitarian and development actors following the Mali crisis and during the transition period that has followed.

In early 2013, Groupe URD conducted a real-time evaluation of humanitarian needs in Mali for the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ Centre de Crise in order to conduct an initial assessment and inform future programming, in a context which was notably marked by the military intervention and the food crisis.

We also conducted the Mali case study which was part of the strategic evaluation of internal coordination for the International Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

The study for the World Bank on sparsely populated areas in Northern Mali began in the autumn. This study aimed to find appropriate solutions for these specific areas which are very isolated and often marginalized, economically or politically. The study highlighted the need to reinforce the role of local political structures, adapt structural aspects of the state and basic services, and support the main economic sectors in these areas.
In parallel, several evaluations were carried out in Chad, such as the evaluation of local partners of the Swiss Cooperation and Development Department, for whom Groupe URD carried out 9 evaluations between June 2011 and March 2013, and the evaluation of the Support Programme for the Stabilisation of Eastern Chad for the French Development Agency. At the end of the year, in partnership with the IRAM, we began a mid-term evaluation of the Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation implemented by the World Food Programme in Chad over a period of 3 years (2012-2015). This programme aims to reinforce food security, livelihoods and the resilience of Central African refugees in the south, and Sudanese refugees and displaced Chadians in the East. It also includes an institution building section in order to improve the early warning system and crisis responses. In addition to the analysis of the programme itself, the evaluation aims to begin strategic reflection about the WFP’s future projects in this country.

Groupe URD also travelled to other countries in the Sahel region to conduct evaluations. For example, the evaluation of the programme to assist the population following the floods of July 2010 in Centre Nord and Est regions of Burkina Faso, and the evaluation of Oxfam USA’s response to the 2012 food crisis in Senegal and Gambia. In October 2013, Groupe URD also launched a meta-evaluation of systems for monitoring contexts and projects set up during humanitarian programmes funded by DFID in 5 countries of the Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad). The evaluation, which will continue in 2014, will suggest improvements to be made to the monitoring systems in place, both at the level of programmes and generally for all of DFID’s partners.

The Sahel, an area of great fragility but also of great resilience, is both a source of learning and an area of experimentation for the aid sector. Groupe URD has contributed to these efforts via a large number of activities. The objective is to strengthen our presence in Mali and the neighbouring countries (concept of the Mali+ zone) in 2014.
2013 IN FIGURES
Groupe URD’s budget stabilised in 2013 at 1.96M Euros, in keeping with the Administrative Board’s desire for financial consolidation after 20 years of continual growth (the founding members having worked on a voluntary basis without a budget for the first five years).

2013 was also a year in which Groupe URD invested in projects it holds dear. For certain projects which received little or no funding this year, Groupe URD decided to use its own funds to continue to support them: Quality and the Sigmah project, the Environment and the Haiti Observatory.

Groupe URD’s accounts, which have been certified by our external auditor, are therefore balanced with a positive result, but with reduced reserves.
Spending was balanced on the different activities of the association: research, evaluation, training, organisational support and dissemination all contribute to learning and improving practices, which is Groupe URD’s mandate.

The different sources of funds received show that Groupe URD works with all kinds of donors, whether public or private, national, European or international, thus strengthening its position internationally. 80% of funding received by Groupe URD is public. This funding is mainly used to implement projects which provide the sector with knowledge or tools to help improve humanitarian practices.
The number of external consultations has increased sharply in the last two years, from 360 days of consulting in 2011 to more than 1000 in 2013, while the salaried staff has remained stable at 17 (full time equivalent) since 2009. The strategy has been to manage the increase in activity without having to increase the payroll, while consolidating the network of experts associated to Groupe URD. All these changes show the permanent staff’s capacity to adapt and increase its productivity.

This year, Groupe URD received authorisation from the Regional Directorate for Youth, Sport and Cohesion to take on civil volunteers (two per year). This authorization strengthens Groupe URD’s human resource strategy and will allow it to contribute to the training of young graduates who are looking to get their first professional experience in the humanitarian sector. In addition to the two civil volunteers, there were four interns in 2013. This year, Groupe URD also received the support of volunteers on the issue of the Environment and on the development of Sigmah thanks to “Google Summer of Code”.

Groupe URD’s human resource management and strategy are supported by the Administrative Board which is very involved in the running of the association. It validated a financial assessment of the association, following a request from Management and with support from FRIO, with the aim of reinforcing legal and fiscal aspects of the organisation. Groupe URD has always been concerned that it should be run in a transparent manner.
THANKS

to Groupe URD's partners


And to our private donors....
LIST OF EVALUATIONS
- Evaluation of projects funded by Swiss Solidarity in Haiti, 2010-2013
- Evaluation of the “Programme d’appui à la stabilisation” (PAS) in Eastern Chad, February 2011-February 2013
- Evaluation of SDC local partners in Chad, June 2011-March 2013
- Monitoring and Evaluation of the LRRD – REPI 2010 programme (following the floods of July 2010 in the Centre Nord and Est regions of Burkina Faso), November 2011-June 2013
- Evaluation of the Support Programme for the Reconstruction of Housing and Neighbourhoods in Haiti, Mid 2012-end 2014
- Evaluation of DG ECHO’s Fleet Management, September 2012-March 2013
- Real-time evaluation of humanitarian needs in Mali for the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ Centre de Crise, March 2013
- Evaluation of the project EUROSHA, March-September 2013
- Evaluation of Oxfam USA’s response to the 2012 food crisis in Senegal and Gambia, April-May 2013
- Evaluation of the monitoring systems included in humanitarian programmes funded by DFID in the Sahel, October 2013-March 2014
- Evaluation of the WFP’s “Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation” in Chad, December 2013-April 2014
- Iterative evaluation of the integrated reconstruction and urban and economic development project in the neighbourhood of Christ-Roi in Port-au-Prince, 2013-2016

LIST OF STUDIES
- Reconstruction and the Environment in the Metropolitan Region of Port-au-Prince: Bristout-Bobin, February-March 2013
- Study on the reduction of the impact of natural disasters in the Indian Ocean region, Spring 2013
- Review of internal coordination within the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, July-August 2013
- Two studies for the British Red Cross in urban contexts, in Nepal and Haiti, July-October 2013
- Study “Security and Humanitarian Aid in Haiti”, June-September 2013
- Study on governance in areas with low population density in Mali, October 2013-February 2014
- Study of current donor strategies and practices with regard to the environment, December 2013-March 2014
- Horn of Africa vade-mecum for the French Ministry of foreign affairs, January-August 2013
- Inter agency resilience study, for the IASC, October 2013-April 2014
- Study on Civil-Military relations, INSPIRE, July 2012-July 2013
- Between political crisis, humanitarian action, development and the reconstruction of a fragile state [...] in the Central African Republic, INSPIRE, November 2013-February 2014
- Study to develop a socio-cultural evaluation tool for WASH programmes, for IFRC, September 2013

LIST OF TRAININGS (except academic trainings)
- “Integrating environmental issues into humanitarian action” training course, 11-13 and 17-19 February 2013, Kaboul
- “Humanitarian principles” training course, 24-26 February 2013, Kaboul
- “Evaluating the Quality of Humanitarian Action” training course, 22-25 October 2013, Plaisians
- Introduction to Sigmah: short training course, 3 April 2013, Paris
- “Integrating environmental issues into humanitarian action” training course, 19-20 November 2013, Geneva
- “Evaluating the Quality of Humanitarian Action” training course, 25-29 November 2013, Port-au-Prince
- “Evaluating the Quality of Humanitarian Action” training course, for Handicap International, 17-19 December 2013, Lyon

QUALITY SUPPORT
- Improving the quality of cash transfer programmes supported by the WFP in Haiti, March-August 2013
- Methods and tools to improve the quality of medical equipment projects, 2011-2013
- Sigmah, a computerised system for managing humanitarian projects
**EVENTS ORGANISED BY GROUPE URD**

- Conference "Lessons learned about the stabilisation process in Eastern Chad", 4 February 2013, N'Djamena
- Conference "Resilience: A global concept focussing on the Sahel region", 26-27 February 2013, Dakar
- Seminar "Cities and crises: operational and anticipation strategies", 29 April 2013, Paris
- Experience exchange workshop on LRRD – REPI 2010 programme, 22 May 2013, Ouagadougou
- Workshop "A humanitarian certification mechanism as a way of improving the quality of aid – under what conditions?", in partnership with Coordination Sud's Humanitarian Commission, 20 September 2013, Paris
- Seminar "En quête de la post-urgence durable : les actions des partenares de la Chaine du Bonheur en Haïti", from 30 September to 2 October 2013, Port-au-Prince
- Round table "Maternal nutrition in emergencies", 12 November 2013, Brussels
- Workshop "Security and Humanitarian Aid in Haiti", 12 December, Port-au-Prince
- And facilitation of the workshop « Exchange of Practices and Lessons Learned on Resilience Building in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel Regions », 2-3 July 2013, Dakar

**INTERVENTIONS IN CONFERENCES**

- 13th National Conference on Science, Policy and the environment, 15-17 January 2013, Washington
- 10th Dubai International Humanitarian Aid & Development Conference, 25-27 March 2013, Dubai
- 28th ALNAP Annual Meeting, 05-06 March 2013, Washington
- Conference "Learning from the city : humanitarian action in urban areas", 19 April 2013, London
- "Haiti 2013 learning conference: From a single-country large-scale response experience to a global and institutionalized knowledge", 18-19 September 2013, Panama
- Workshop "La transparence au sein des ONG de solidarité internationale", 16 September 2013, Paris
- 4th "Forum Espace Humanitaire", 27-28 September 2013, Annecy
- Conference "Résilience et sécurité alimentaire, un enjeu Nord-Sud", 15 October 2013, Paris
- World Conference on Humanitarian Studies, 25-27 October 2013, Istanbul
- Conference "War in the cities", 16 October 2013, Madrid
- AidEx, 13 November 2013, Bruxelles
- Conference "EquipAid", 19-20 November 2013, Chamonix
- Conference "The environmental impact of mines/jerw and mine action in the arab world", 10-12 December 2013, Kuwait
- Humanitarian symposium, 12 December 2013, New-York

**ACRONYMS**

ACBAR - Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief  
AFD - Agence française de développement (French Development Agency)  
ALNAP - Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action  
CAR - Central African Republic  
DEVC - Development and Cooperation (European Commission)  
DFID - Department for International Development  
ECH - European Community Humanitarian Office  
GERES - Groupe Énergies Renouvelables, Environnement et Solidarités  
GHDI - Good humanitarian donorship initiative  
GPPI - Global Public Policy Institute  
IASC - Inter Agency Standing Committee  
IECAH - Instituto de Estudios sobre Conflictos y Acción Humanitaria  
IFCR - International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies  
IRAM - Institute for research and application of development methods  
JEU - Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit  
LRRD - Link from Relief to Reconstruction and Development  
NGO - Non Governmental Organisation  
NICRT - New Information and Communication Technologies  
OCHA - Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs  
PAS - Programme d'appui à la stabilisation (Stabilisation Support Programme)  
RCA - République centrafricaine  
TDH - Terre des hommes  
UN - United Nations  
UNEP - United Nations Environment Programme  
URD - Urgence, Réhabilitation, Développement  
WASH - Water, Sanitation and Hygiene  
WFP - World Food Programme
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