

While working with local partners holds a central role in the development sector practice in the case of emergencies is much more varied. Combining the contextualised knowledge and experience of the local partner with the humanitarian expertise of international agencies can substantially improve the effectiveness of humanitarian aid and contribute to building local skills and capacity. Achieving this however may not be as easy as it sounds.

Kicking off this issue of VOICE Out Loud, Christian Aid reflects on the benefits of working with local partners. Throughout the newsletter, it becomes clear that building a partnership takes time. As reflected in the articles written by Unnati- an Indian partner of Malteser International- and by GVC, relationships change and grow over time. Partnership often starts through cooperation in development or reconstruction, which lays the foundation necessary to be able to cooperate in emergencies. Given that the first response to disasters is carried out by people and organisations already present on the ground, supporting local actors to be prepared for disasters is key, as Tearfund demonstrates. The next step, CAFOD proposes, is trying to improve direct financing to local actors, which would require a shift in mind-set from donors.

While many people instantly think about local NGOs when the term 'local partner' is used, several VOICE members indicate that their vision of the concept is larger. ACF for example considers local and national authorities also as partners, while others mention local churches, local working groups, women groups etc.

However, working with local partners is not always straightforward. For example, their capacity to handle large amounts of funding may be limited, and donor requirements can be difficult for partners to adhere to. The need for quick results in humanitarian aid- with the aim of saving lives- may not leave room for the long-term approach solid partnerships require, but rather demands a strong instant capacity to change the mode of working. This includes the need to respect humanitarian principles; an issue which FinnChurchAid looks into.

In the 'View on the EU section', we are proud to present an interview with Rosita Šoryte, who is currently chairing the Council Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid on behalf of the Lithuanian presidency.

The 'field focus' written by IMC looks at the forgotten crisis in the Central African Republic, fully backing a recent call to action for CAR by European Commissioner Georgieva.

VOICE

VOICE stands for 'Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies'. It is a network representing 83 European non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in humanitarian aid worldwide. VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor with the European Union on emergency aid, relief, rehabilitation and disaster risk reduction. As a European network, it represents and promotes the values and specificities of humanitarian NGOs, in collaboration with other humanitarian actors.

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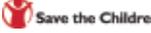
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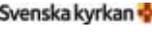
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VOICE AT WORK

..... BACK COVER



FROM THE VOICE PRESIDENT



Local partners are most often in the forefront of response during the first days when disaster strikes. When there is conflict the picture becomes even more grim: branches of the Syrian Red Cross (SARC) count amongst the few actors able to operate in Syria. The price is high; 22 of their staff have already paid with their lives. This is why the humanitarian principles of impartiality, independence and neutrality become so vital. Even so the principles are no longer a guarantee for humanitarian workers; on the contrary humanitarian workers have become increasingly soft targets. Local aid workers and their organizations are even more in the shooting line than international NGOs.

Starting in Solferino in 1859, local partners have always played a central role in the delivery and implementation of aid. Faith-based organizations with their local constituencies have probably the longest experience in such collaboration. However, over recent years working with local partners has become more of a trend both for INGOs and donors. And UN agencies are also increasingly looking at how they can work more closely through Southern partners. The concept of 'local partners' might be misleading though, since we are not just talking about NGOs, but also local and national authorities or even business and other state actors. Everybody agrees that we need Southern partners in a much more leading role than before if we as a global humanitarian community want to address the increasing humanitarian needs which lie ahead.

However, there are also a number of challenges both for INGOs and Southern partners in this trend. For a Northern NGO, to stress that they work in partnership with Southern NGOs now verges on a mantra. Not doing so can often be interpreted negatively by both donors and governments of affected states. While donors also are pushing for a strengthened role for Southern NGOs, at the same time they are ever increasing the administrative burden in relation to the reporting of the projects they fund. This leaves local NGOs often unable to apply for funds. While the UN is strengthening its reforms in the field, coordination and cluster meetings are most likely to be held in English, and in locations which are "central" only for international civil servants. As a consequence the voices of local NGOs are often not heard.

There is a need for change and improvements on all sides. International NGOs have to develop further the concept of partnership, and what it means both in policy and practice, including the development of much more rigorous risk management processes for identifying and supporting partners. More capacity building, using complementary strengths of local and INGOs is also needed. But project-centred (often 'stop-start') engagement with local NGOs does not provide the basis for long-term partnership and capacity building required to enable them to become more effective and self-sustaining actors. This demands a long-term commitment to a partner, and that is not always the first priority when disaster strikes. Scaling-up the full participation of local NGOs in assessment and evaluation processes (including with regards fragility, risk and contextual analysis) is another challenge.

While Southern partners can often achieve better access in conflict regions to people in need (when there is no possibility for INGO access) and have solid knowledge of local context, their financial and administrative capacity is often insufficient for the level of administrative burden Western donors place upon Northern NGOs they fund. NGOs engaging in humanitarian aid in third countries should also comply with the humanitarian principles. In some cases, principles such as neutrality can be better enforced by INGOs for reasons including the intense pressure put on local NGOs and individuals to take sides. In addition, some areas of work (e.g. protection) should rather be done by an INGO. Accountability and transparency issues can also be challenging when Northern and Southern NGOs seek to work together and/or the latter want to obtain Western funding directly.

In order to move from talking about how important Southern partners are to a different way of doing business in the future, Northern NGOs will have to redefine their role and the way they work. Southern organizations meanwhile need to constantly strengthen their operational capacity and improve the quality of their work. These processes will take a lot of time and energy, and better recognition of the obstacles and challenges ahead is needed from all actors, including the donors.

Nicolas Borsinger
President of VOICE

AN END TO MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

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‘Though local and national actors are key to effective humanitarian work, they are often marginalized from international relief efforts. A new report explores just how much partnership approaches could improve the current humanitarian system and how this could mark a fundamental shift in how the sector prepares for and responds to disasters.’



A great deal of support has been voiced for the concept of partnering with local organisations in disaster preparedness and response. The Global Humanitarian Platform has acknowledged that “local capacity is one of the main assets to enhance and on which to build”. Access, cultural sensitivity, sustainability and resilience were among a number of advantages noted in a recent report on working with local NGOsⁱⁱ commissioned by the European Commission. These are just two of many endorsements of the partnership approach in recent years. But there is also a widely acknowledged lack of support for partnership in practice. The UK’s 2011 Humanitarian Emergency Response Review put it starkly: “Local capacities are not utilized, the beneficiary is not involved enough and the quality of delivery is lower than it should be.”ⁱⁱⁱ



NEGLECTING LOCAL CAPACITY

Major emergencies of the last decade demonstrate this repeatedly: the immediate response to the Haiti earthquake in 2010 by local organisations—many of whose staff had suffered terrible personal losses—was indicative of the central role local capacity plays in meeting humanitarian needs. But the real-time evaluation of the emergency identified the failure of the international response to involve local actors adequately as a key challenge even a year after the earthquake hit. Much of the aid provided in the immediate aftermath of the Asian tsunami was delivered by local organisations. But the international aid community’s failure to assist this was so widespread that the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition noted that “the international humanitarian community needs a fundamental reorientation from supplying aid to supporting and facilitating communities’ own relief and recovery priorities”.^{iv}

So what is needed for this fundamental reorientation to occur? If the current international humanitarian system has privileged a northern-based operational system for decades, how is it to be shifted to an approach that puts local organisations at the centre of humanitarian operations? How does partnership with local organisations provide benefits over and above a response mounted, say, by an international agency’s field office staffed by local people? And, if there is a growing support for the concept of partnership-based relief, in what areas does it have the greatest potential to strengthen aid delivery? These are some of the questions the

humanitarian community needs to address if it is fully committed to capitalising on the benefits of working in partnership.

This year, Christian Aid embarked on a research project with four other agencies: Oxfam GB, ActionAid, Tearfund and CAFOD to try and find answers to some of these questions. The study assessed partner-led responses by the agencies in four recent humanitarian disasters: conflict in DRC (2009-12), Haiti earthquake (2010), Kenya food crisis (2010) and Pakistan floods (2010) against five OECD-DAC^v criteria for evaluating humanitarian aid: relevance / appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, coverage, and connectedness. By doing so, it set out to get to the heart of what particular benefits arise from working in partnership with local organisations, what lessons can be learned and how the humanitarian sector can absorb these.



IMPROVEMENTS IN KEY AREAS

The findings of the forthcoming report, ‘*Missed Opportunities: the case for strengthening national and local partnership-based humanitarian responses*’, due to be launched in November, reveal that partnerships have clear potential to improve the humanitarian sector in at least three of the five abovementioned areas: relevance / appropriateness, effectiveness and connectedness. The first of these - **relevance / appropriateness** - relates to one of the central premises of partnership work: that local and national actors have a clearer understanding of the context, culture and internal dynamics of a disaster-affected community than their international counterparts.

They are therefore in a better position to deliver appropriate programmes, whether in terms of identifying those most in need, recognizing sensitivities in a community which could hamper aid delivery, or identifying the resources already available within a community to address their needs. Following the Haiti earthquake for example, Christian Aid’s partner organisation Aprosifa identified networks of local women to cook for groups of families and paid them for it, with a means for direct feedback from the families. In this way, food was provided to those who most needed it, in a way that was accountable, locally acceptable and supported small business.

The **effectiveness** of a humanitarian response can be enhanced by partnership in a number of ways. Speed is crucial to saving lives and restricting the

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'The process of developing well-functioning partnerships is challenging, and requires the investment of time and resources'

long term damage caused by a disaster. Following the earthquake in Haiti and floods in Pakistan, local organisations were able to start delivering assistance to communities several days before international agencies. The partnership model also scores well on accountability and community engagement, which contribute to an effective response. In many cases, industry standards such as the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) were introduced in the development of partnerships which in turn led to enhanced beneficiary consultation^{vi}, and a better understanding at community level of individual and collective rights.

The third area where partnerships were found to enhance performance - **connectedness** - points to a way forward in one of the current major sectoral debates. Much of the discussion around resilience focuses on the need to build emergency response capacity within the bigger picture of long term development work; so that the two are consistent and mutually supporting. An increase in slow onset and 'every day' emergencies - crises which recur within a context of chronic vulnerability - makes this all the more important. Yet for many local organisations, who are likely to tackle all areas across the disaster spectrum from resilience, response to recovery, this is less of a problem than for INGOs - even those with a locally-staffed field office. In many cases, the silos that are often decried as the source of INGO problems simply do not exist.

★ THE CHALLENGES OF PARTNERSHIP

None of this is to say that partnership will instantly resolve the problems of humanitarian response. It brings challenges of its own. It is a common assumption, for example, that smaller local and national NGOs are not able to deliver at the same volume and to reach as many people as INGOs. While this is often true, it is worth noting that partnership with larger national NGOs in affected countries can help to resolve this problem. Furthermore, some partners interviewed for our report felt that the problem was not always about their ability to deliver at scale, but their perceived inability to absorb funds and spend at scale.

The process of developing well-functioning partnerships is also challenging, and requires the investment of time and resources. Staff on both sides of the relationship need to be trained in partnership working. Cultural differences may need to be explained and capacity needs to be built. Unless carefully handled, the imbalance of power,

which is implicit in a relationship between funder and funded, can too easily lead to an arrangement which is less about mutual support and more about simply outsourcing humanitarian relief.

But these issues can be overcome: many of the difficulties experienced by local organisations derive not from the nature of partnership itself, but from a wider humanitarian system which does not do enough to support them. The Cluster system, for example, has often been identified as a source of problems, prioritising the convenience of INGO or multilateral agency staff over the participation of local actors. And too much humanitarian funding excludes local capacity. What money does find its way through the system, via multilateral agencies and partnership-based INGOs to local partners, arrives too late to be of maximum benefit in early stages of the response.

★ THE WAY FORWARD

Greater investment in local and national partnerships is key and should be prioritised by humanitarian donors. One way of doing this would be providing sustained finance for a multi-donor fund for disaster management capacity building. Policy frameworks need to change in favour of partnerships. An important first step would be to make southern partnerships a central plank of humanitarian policy agendas.

The development of a more joined-up and coordinated system of partnership between INGOs, donors and local and national networks is also key to help strengthen practice. This would involve partnership moving from a series of bilateral relationships between international agencies and local organisations to a more networked system, with greater coordination and information exchange.

These steps would contribute to a systemic shift in the sector, and help lay the foundations for a humanitarian enterprise that is more balanced and accountable, supporting and collaborating with local organisations rather than sweeping them aside. The benefits of partnership are not in doubt; what is now required is committed action from the humanitarian sector to capitalise on these.

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ⁱ Global Humanitarian Platform, 2007, www.globalhumanitarianplatform.org/doc00002419.doc

ⁱⁱ The report was commissioned by ECHO (humanitarian aid and civil protection department of the European Commission) and carried out by Germax, http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/evaluation/2013/LNGO_Evaluation.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Humanitarian Emergency Response Review, p.26

^{iv} <http://www.alnap.org/poolfiles/889.pdf>

^v Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and Development Assistance Committee

^{vi} See forthcoming report 'Missed Opportunities: the case for strengthening national and local partnership-based humanitarian responses'.



BUILDING LOCAL PARTNER CAPACITY FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

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'After every disaster comes the anguished hindsight.'

★ After every disaster comes the anguished hindsight. *If only those hills had not been deforested, the heavy rain would not have caused a flash flood. If only the builders had used properly reinforced concrete, the building would not have collapsed in the earth tremor. If only people had known the year's weather forecast, they would have planted drought-resistant crops, or sold most of their livestock while they could still get a good price.*

Disaster risk reduction (DRR to the acronym-addicted) is the process of trying to anticipate the "if-onlies" and act on them before a natural hazard strikes. And local-level organisations – community institutions, local government, local civil society – have a number of key advantages in DRR.

Firstly, no external organisation can equal their situational knowledge. Outsiders may ask penetrating questions and offer useful knowledge (for example, about projected climate trends or regional early warning systems), but only local institutions can apply that knowledge to figure out where people are most at risk.

Secondly, only organisations that are present and prepared when disaster strikes can give lifesaving first response. The local responders must have already thought through contingency plans, practiced, and equipped themselves – all vital aspects of DRR.

Thirdly, when we dig into the reasons for disaster, the vulnerabilities we find are often highly political. *If only the government had extended the seawall to protect the slum, it wouldn't have been destroyed by the storm surge. If only farmers hadn't expanded onto the best pasture land, the pastoralists' herds could have survived the drought. If only building codes applied to rich business owners, the garment factory wouldn't have collapsed.* These politicised issues are the kind of problem that local civil society has the legitimacy and relationships to address.

So Tearfund's DRR work prioritises building our local partners' capacity to assess vulnerabilities, identify and address the root causes of disaster,

prepare for emergency response, manage conflicts, and advocate to power-holders. This capacity building is carried out over many years of close relationship, not just through a single project or funding cycle. It also involves a great deal of South-South learning between partners and reflection on partners' own experience, rather than being mediated primarily through Tearfund.

For example, for over a decade Tearfund and its partner EFICOR have been working together on DRR in India. EFICOR's prior engagement with disasters had been limited to humanitarian relief. After some early workshops and pilot projects which established a DRR skill base, EFICOR and Tearfund partnered together in a five year, multi-country programme (funded by DfID) which also included partners in Bangladesh and Malawi. During this fruitful period, EFICOR rapidly expanded its DRR capacities through practice and through learning from other partners and countries as well as Tearfund advisors and practitioners.

EFICOR worked intensively in areas of Bihar state where it had previously carried out flood relief in 2004. It helped villages organise Disaster Management Committees and come up with action plans to use their own resources to reduce the impact of future floods. This involved challenging but rewarding work on cross-caste relationships, as when a marginalised community and powerful landlords agreed on the building of a raised evacuation causeway across the landlords' property. When the floods came again in 2007, the damage was minimal in the villages where EFICOR was working, thanks to the communities' preparedness and flood mitigation work.

EFICOR also increased its capacity for advocacy on DRR policy and planning, building close linkages with local government and State and National Disaster Management Authorities. This led to its involvement in drafting national flood risk reduction guidelines for humanitarian agencies (published in 2010). Eventually, EFICOR worked with Sphere India (a national coalition of humanitarian agencies which plays a coordination and standard-setting role) to turn its Bihar experience into a model "District Disaster Management Plan" (DDMP). They

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showed how to build on community-level disaster planning and end up with a participatory district-level action plan, drawing in all government departments as well as other stakeholders like business.

The Bihar state government is currently in the process of replicating this DDMP in all of its disaster-prone districts, and Sphere India and the National Disaster Management Authority have promoted it nationally. Internationally, Tearfund national staff and partners in Nepal, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan have all learned directly from this process. EFICOR's story thus shows how a long-term, committed capacity building partnership can build up a local partner to have a DRR impact at every level – local, subnational, national, and international.

Not all of Tearfund's partners are local development organisations; we also work extensively with local networks of churches. It can be a challenge to help local faith communities engage with the international aid system. They are not organised like a typical NGO, and many can not manage large external financial flows. Traditional humanitarian agencies often question religious actors' capacity for impartiality, and some churches question whether preparing for disaster is part of their core vocation.

But religious communities are often vital for immediate post-emergency response; in many areas they are the best-organised social institution (whether at village level or in socially fragmented slums), able to coordinate response, assess damage, and interact with outsiders in the aftermath of a shock. Their buildings often serve as evacuation centres in cyclones or floods. Religious actors can also play an essential role in reducing disaster risk in a community, through early warning (mosque loudspeakers, church bells), credible communication of messages about e.g. natural hazards and climate change, or tackling the attitudes and power relationships that make socially excluded people vulnerable to disaster. The churches with which Tearfund partners recognise that providing aid impartially to the people most in need, without reference to the beneficiaries' religion or other beliefs, is itself a religious obligation.

Therefore, Tearfund is part of a Joint Learning Initiative (JLI)ⁱ on the role of local faith communities in building community resilience, alongside other Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and secular partners (both NGO and academic). Also UNHCR is a very active JLI partner as in many humanitarian crises, local faith networks play a huge role in dealing with displacement and refugee care.

As one key resource for the long-term process of capacity-building church partners for DRR, Tearfund has produced a handbook, *Disasters & the Local Church*ⁱⁱ, for the leaders of local congregations in disaster-prone areas. The book helps them prepare for emergency response and offers practical illustrations of how to reduce risk from several major categories of disaster, including earthquake, flood, landslide, windstorm, and drought. It is currently available in French, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Bangla, Burmese, Nepali, and Chinese, and has been taken up by church networks in over a dozen countries since its publication late in 2011.

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'A long-term, committed capacity building partnership can build up a local partner to have a DRR impact at every level - local, subnational, national, and international.'

ⁱ www.jlifc.com

ⁱⁱ http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/themes/disasters/disasters_and_the_local_church/

SUPPORTING MINISTRIES OF HEALTH TO TAKE THE LEAD IN ADDRESSING SEVERE ACUTE MALNUTRITION

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'Only 7-13% of all children affected by severe acute malnutrition worldwide are receiving treatment today.'

★ The approach of NGOs specialized in the management of severe acute malnutrition (SAM) has changed substantially in recent years. There has been recognition that, despite huge advances over the last 25 years on how SAM is treated, coverage of treatment services remains shockingly low, with only 7-13% of all children affected by SAM worldwide receiving treatment today. Severe acute malnutrition is the most dangerous form of malnutrition; if untreated it can result in death. Children suffering from SAM either look extremely thin, skeletal and elderly, or they can have an oedema, which makes them look puffy and usually irritable, weak and lethargic¹. It can be the direct result of a food shortage, a recent illness and inappropriate child care practices, or a combination of such factors. Global coverage to SAM treatment can only be achieved by ensuring availability of and access to treatment at all levels of the health system.

★ THE FUNDAMENTAL ROLE OF MINISTRIES OF HEALTH

Governments should take the lead and ensure that SAM treatment is a core component of the basic health package. In addition, health authorities at national and district levels need to demonstrate strong leadership and coordination capacity. Of course, the precondition is a functional health system that has the capacity to deliver services; if this is not the case, it is important to prioritize strengthening the system for all basic health services, including SAM treatment.

★ WORKING WITH GOVERNMENTS TO ADDRESS NUTRITION IN HEALTH

As part of the evolution of SAM treatment, the goal for NGOs treating SAM has expanded: it is no longer sufficient or relevant to simply directly provide treatment in the short term. There is a need to ensure that treatment is and will remain regularly available and accessible over the long term as part of routine health services. NGOs should shift their mind-set from being an 'implementer' to being a 'facilitator', working with governments to instigate the necessary changes. In adopting a supporting and capacity building role, NGOs are advocating to make the management of acute malnutrition a regular

government service, conducting joint needs assessments on the health system and developing strategies for health system strengthening. Key activities include:

- advocating with senior decision makers to prioritize and allocate necessary resources for activities related to SAM treatment within health facilities
- providing technical support to the government structures to develop up-to-date and context-appropriate national protocols for the treatment of SAM
- facilitating training and workshops with health workers for basic skills on SAM treatment delivery and overall management
- coaching and providing technical support on application of skills by health workers as well as to facilitate context-appropriate integration of SAM treatment in the existing system
- supervising health facilities providing SAM treatment, jointly with local health authorities
- regularly monitoring and evaluating quality of care, protocol adherence, supply management, etc.
- evaluating impact through nutrition prevalence and coverage assessments and making recommendations to the health authorities for improvements.

★ CONSEQUENCES FOR NGOS AND OTHER PARTNERS: NEW WAYS OF WORKING

Several NGOs with a history of direct implementation of SAM treatment have indeed started to review their ways of working to adapt to the government-led approach. For example, this shift needs staff to take a more 'hands-off' role than before. In addition, longer-term staff contracts are required for a much slower capacity building process with a need for continuity. Good skills in negotiation, diplomacy, training and coaching are required, as well as a credible record of medical and/or nutritional training and programming experience. In other words, the shift indicates that skills in service delivery alone are no longer sufficient.

‘There is a need to ensure that treatment is and will remain regularly available and accessible over the long term as part of routine health services.’

Moreover, NGO staff are now often seconded to the health system and work as part of the local office in order to foster stronger links and to ensure Ministry ownership and leadership.

Clarity on the definitions of strategies also needs to be ensured: while ‘strengthening’ aims at long term capacity reinforcement of the system, ‘substitution’ aims to fill a short-term identified gap. In addition, a crisis management strategy needs to complement these two, by dealing with seasonal crisis peaks. There has to be a commitment by NGOs to the health system as a whole in order to achieve sustainable availability of services. NGOs need to accept that taking on this adapted role means harbouring a lower profile while efficiently supporting health authorities. It requires breaking away from imposing the ‘proven model’ for community based treatment of SAM to adapting it to the existing health system in a given context.

Improvement is still possible on the coordination side. Coordination and alignment between actors (Ministry, INGOs, donors and UN agencies) is vital for these types of partnerships to be efficient and effective. Competencies are often complementary and if coordinated, will allow for health services to be increasingly available.

★ LONGER TERM SUPPORT NEEDED FROM DONORS

It takes longer to achieve quality outcomes when supporting processes to strengthen the health system in integrating SAM treatment and when building capacities to ensure routine services. Short-term emergency-type funding is no longer appropriate as narrow timeframes do not allow for the wide scope of activities to be accomplished; longer term funding is needed. Also linkages between various emergency and development donor funding mechanisms need to be strengthened.

While ACF will keep implementing life-saving interventions (including direct SAM management) where necessary (as for example in Somalia currently), this will always be done with a longer term approach in mind, certainly in those countries where emergencies are

predictable. Today ACF promotes the provision of SAM treatment within the health system and managed by the authorities in more than 80% of its missions. The required new roles described above have mobilized nutrition and health teams, yet the cultural shift to being a ‘facilitator’ is sometimes still to be reflected and operationalised in the field. The better we all get at making SAM treatment part of regular health services, the quicker we will move towards global coverage, saving thousands of children’s lives.

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PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION: AN INDIAN CASE STUDY

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MALTESER INTERNATIONAL

Malteser International is the relief agency of the Sovereign Order of Malta for humanitarian aid. With over 100 projects annually in some 25 countries throughout Africa, Asia and the Americas, Malteser International provides emergency relief after disasters and supports recovery efforts with a focus on sustainable development in the fields of health, WASH and disaster risk reduction. For nearly 60 years, Malteser International has been standing by those affected by poverty, disease, conflict and disaster helping them lead a healthy life with dignity – without distinction of religion, race or political persuasion. Christian values and the humanitarian principles are the foundation of the work.

www.malteser-international.org

UNNATI

UNNATI - Organisation for Development Education is a voluntary non-profit organization registered under the Societies Registration Act (1860) in 1990 in India. Unnati's aim is to promote social inclusion and democratic governance so that the vulnerable sections of society are empowered to effectively and decisively participate in mainstream development and decision making processes. All activities are carried out through three thematic centres: 1. Social Inclusion and Empowerment, 2. Civic Leadership, Social Accountability and Governance and 3. Social Determinants of Disaster Risk Reduction.

<http://www.unnati.org>



The **partnership** between the Indian NGO Unnati and the Germany-based INGOⁱ Malteser International is more than a decade old. It is characterised by mutual learning, collaborative programming for vulnerability reduction, sharing of responsibilities, and a high degree of accountability. Over the years Unnati has had the privilege to interact with the officials of Malteser International at all levels, including the Director and Board Members, which further strengthened the partnership.

In 2002 Unnati was introduced to Malteser International by one of their Indian partners to work on the **Gujarat earthquake response**. As the initial emergency response was over by then, our first discussion was on priorities for post-disaster response based on principles of social justice and equity. Despite humanitarian support from all over the world and a committed domestic government, some families were excluded from rehabilitation support, so we decided to identify such vulnerable families and enable them to rebuild their houses. There were hurdles though due to absence of land titles, so Malteser International officials provided assistance to get these land titles certified by the government, and this enabled the project to progress.

The **2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami** also struck South India. Malteser asked Unnati to assess the damage and identify potential partners, which was a great honour. On people's demand, the government allowed reconstruction of houses within Coastal Regulation Zones for those families who used to live there. During this time Unnati actively campaigned for owner-driven reconstruction rather than reconstruction controlled by external agencies. Malteser International shared our vision. The approach became an example programme that others learnt from and we became an active member of an advocacy network to promote owner-driven reconstruction. In turn, this project had a positive influence on other housing projects of Malteser in Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

Over time the partnership grew stronger. Our meetings were more frequent as a Malteser International representative was stationed in India, and we grew stronger in post-disaster assessments and designs for response. In addition, due to our strengthened capacity, Unnati developed in turn new partnerships with Indian NGOs in different parts of the country for disaster response and **community-based disaster risk reduction (DRR)**. For example, a valuable partnership has been established in North India on response to flood

hazards and flood risk reduction, building community capacity and maintaining an early warning fully owned and operated by the government. This project is now five years old and it gives a great sense of satisfaction that Unnati was involved in designing it. Moreover, we successfully mobilised resources from DG ECHO for it, which was a new experience for us. For this project, Malteser helped us to develop an institutional policy on procurement, results-based reporting, audit protocol and many other accountability systems.

However, a partnership is of course not devoid of **occasional irritation**. For example, we once had a sharp difference of opinion on the procurement process for small manual boats. Local boat makers build boats at almost half of the open market price and procuring from them would strengthen the livelihoods of the local community. However, how to procure boats from informal vendors who do not have printed bills, while still ensuring system compliance and accountability? Our overseas colleagues did not have exposure to this informal part of the Indian economy which manages to produce products and services as good as the formal market, so agreeing was difficult.

From a partnership which started as working on disaster response, we slowly moved towards working on community-based DRR. By repeatedly questioning who is being left out and how to reach out to them, the approach of 'social inclusion' became central in the work of Unnati. Today we are proud that as an institution we proactively reach out to socially excluded groups like dalits, tribals, minorities, persons with a disability, single women, children and elderly without care and protection, as well as people with HIV-AIDS. Due to this focus, we have had funding of BMZⁱⁱ for three years to build community resilience of socially excluded groups.

For Unnati, the partnership with Malteser International is crucial for fostering in-country credibility and recognition, and also to facilitate the linkage with donors, e.g. the German Embassy. We believe that our partnership has now developed to such a level that we can call upon high-ranking officials in Malteser to seek their professional advice and exchange ideas on programme planning, monitoring and evaluation. Unnati cherishes this partnership and looks forward to continue to work in the future in the true spirit of partnership.

Binoy Acharya
Director - Unnati

ⁱ INGO= International Non-Governmental Organisation - ⁱⁱ The German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development

FUNDING AT THE SHARP ENDⁱ

THE ISSUE - WHOSE EMERGENCY IS IT ANYWAY ? THE ROLE OF LOCAL ACTORS

‘Only a small percentage of international humanitarian financing goes directly to national NGOs.’

Local response capacity matters far more than many international actors prefer to acknowledge. Despite the comparative advantages of local actorsⁱⁱ, their participation in international humanitarian dialogue and access to international financial resources is often mediated through international actors.

Recent research commissioned by CAFOD (Caritas England and Wales) ‘Funding at the Sharp End’ aimed to build up a picture of where national NGOs access international funds and in what quantities. The research is part of a wider policy focus of Caritas Internationalis member organisations to facilitate a shift towards a global humanitarian system where 1) international humanitarian financing is recalibrated to enable rather than exclude national NGOs and 2) the purpose of financing local capacity is not only to meet immediate needs but ultimately to enhance the capacity of national actors so as to render the need for international response to disasters exceptional.

CAFOD’s research found that only a small percentage of international humanitarian financing goes directly to national NGOs. The research, which tracked humanitarian funding flows from bilateral donors, three UN agencies, UN pooled funds, IFRC and five UK-based INGOs during 2011, found that only 8.6 % of the total funding (\$8.4 billion) was channelled through national NGOsⁱⁱⁱ.

fund NGOs headquartered in their own country and the EU is legally bound to only fund organisations headquartered within the EU. Some of the larger humanitarian donors with experts at field level, for example UK, US and Switzerland do fund national NGOs directly, whilst others like France and Japan use their embassy staff to select national NGOs. However most of the smaller donors do not have this operational capacity.

★ THE ROLE OF UN AGENCIES

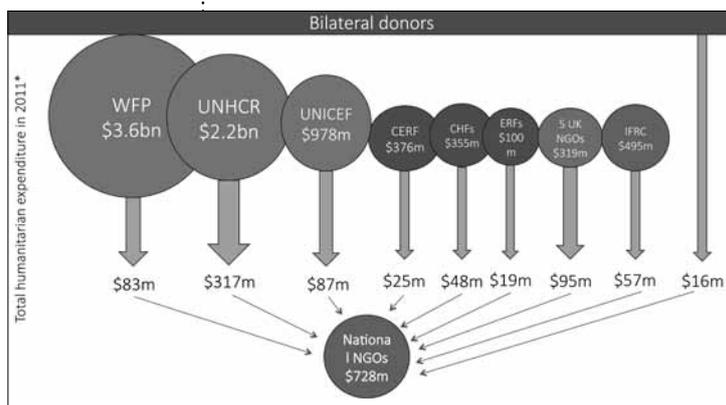
The majority of international humanitarian financing reaching national civil society organisations is from UN agencies and international NGOs, according to CAFOD’s research. For example, 90% of the World Food Programme’s 2100 NGO partners in 2011 were local organisations and in 2011 UNHCR reported passing \$317million to national NGOs: almost 4 times the sum of bilateral donor funding (\$16 million) and country level pooled funds (\$67 million) combined. National NGOs received a growing share of the UNHCR’s total funds passed on to implementing partners, increasing from 9% in 2004 to 15% in 2011.

However, for most UN agencies, it remains difficult to track how much money reaches national NGOs since these data are not centrally collected. This makes it hard to assess how timely, effectively targeted or well spent, funds channelled through UN agencies are. It is also in contradiction with the 2007 Principles of Partnership which state: ‘Communications and transparency, including financial transparency, increase the level of trust among organisations.’ On the positive side UNICEF, WFP and FAO are reviewing their partnership agreements with NGOs, and within several UN agencies there is a clear impetus for change and a potential to reduce the administrative burden on partners.

★ WHAT ABOUT INTERNATIONAL NGOS?

The national NGOs in CAFOD’s research overwhelmingly cited international NGOs as their most accessible and important source of international financing. However, humanitarian NGOs range from those who work almost entirely through local partners to those who directly implement themselves, so data collection is again difficult. There is little public data on the volumes of funds, the timeliness of funding and the implications of funding contracts for local organisations. Positively, many NGOs working in humanitarian response also work in development with the same local organisations.

HUMANITARIAN AID FUNDING FLOWS TRACKED TO NATIONAL NGOS IN 2011^{iv}



★ DO UN MEMBER STATES FUND NATIONAL NGOS?

During the same period, bilateral donors provided a tiny proportion of total funding directly to national NGOs reporting only \$16 million^v, a paltry 0.1% of humanitarian funding. Part of the problem is that despite policy commitments to support local response capacity, in practice many donor governments face legal and policy restrictions, which mean they cannot fund national NGOs directly. For example Norway and Belgium can only

'In identifying priorities for change, national NGOs overwhelmingly cited the need for longer-term funding, as well as inclusion in identifying needs and prioritising responses.'

★ POOLED FUNDS

The UN administered pooled funds are an increasingly important source of funding for national NGOs. In 2011 national NGOs received \$62 million via country-level pooled humanitarian funds and a further \$25 million in CERF (Central Emergency Response Fund) funds passed through UN agencies. However, the accessibility of the 13 Emergency response Funds (ERFs) for national NGOs varies considerably. Some national NGOs report slow proposal approval and disbursement processes which have for example led to near bankruptcy of two Colombian NGOs. The UNDP's Common Humanitarian Funds have increasingly funded national NGOs, rising from 3% of total funds in 2006 to 14% in 2012. In contrast, in 2011, 17.5% of the CERF funds were passed on to NGOs, but only 5.8% (\$25 million) of this reached national NGOs.

★ CHALLENGES FOR NATIONAL NGOS

The national NGOs in our survey reported a major problem in finding out about funding opportunities at all and said that they often miss deadlines because of the short notice period available once they have identified the opportunity. Short humanitarian funding cycles also mean that local implementing organisations have to rapidly scale up and then down again, often losing excellent staff, skills and experience.

International funders' priorities and regulations often fail to take into account the realities of a specific context. Competition, often with international NGOs, leaves respondents at a disadvantage since application criteria and processes are geared towards the language and organisational cultures of international NGOs.

However, the most significant unintended negative consequence for national NGOs relates to the short-term nature of humanitarian funding. The stop-start nature of much of the funding for national organisations has damaging consequences for their organisational sustainability, and because they are often caught in a cycle of intensive implementation followed by new funding applications, they have little opportunity or resources to invest in their own institutional strengthening.

In identifying priorities for change, national NGOs overwhelmingly cited the need for longer-term funding, as well as inclusion in identifying needs and prioritising responses.

★ IS CHANGE REALLY IN THE AIR?

Encouragingly, some international humanitarian

actors have set up innovative ways to fund local organisations and address some of the risks. One example is the RAPID fund in Pakistan managed by Concern and funded by OFDA^{vi}. This has provided assistance to over 2 million people through 130 grants since 2009, largely via Pakistani national NGOs.

While such models may herald a new era in which international NGOs support local organisations with technical expertise, quality and accountability assurance, they should go further towards a system where national organisations directly access these funds. In the UK the new NGO START Fund^{vii} aims to include funding which will be increasingly accessible to national organisations.

The obstacles to scaling up international financing to national NGOs largely relate to a deficit of trust, real and perceived gaps in national NGOs' capacity and the inability of donors (including pooled funds, UN agencies and international NGOs) to manage risk sufficiently.

★ OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE

The lead-up to the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit is an opportunity for all humanitarian actors to identify practical solutions that enable national actors to sit at the decision-making table and respond to crises as equal partners. All donors must work to improve access to existing humanitarian funding streams.

Donors need to consider creating a funding mechanism to bridge the humanitarian/development divide by investing in emergency preparedness and response capacity through a global capacity fund managed at the regional level. But the final word should go to a national NGO from Mali who responded to CAFOD's survey:

"We believe that any emergency must have an appropriate response. Also it is for us to invite international donors to:

- *Not discriminate in granting aid to countries and regions in distress*
- *Seriously strengthen the capacity of national structures in terms of organisational and financial management*
- *Give fair treatment for the financing of international and national NGOs in the humanitarian response to an emergency"*

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ⁱ Based on a research report written by Lydia Poole Consulting 'Funding at the Sharp End' July 2013

www.cafod.org.uk/Policy-and-Research/Emergencies-and-conflict/The-humanitarian-system

ⁱⁱ See article Christian Aid in this issue.

ⁱⁱⁱ Based on data from UN OCHA, FTS, CERF annual HC/RC reports, ERF and CHF annual reports and data provided by selected UN agencies and INGOs.

^{iv} Based on calculations undertaken by the report's author based on UN OCHA, FTS data, CERF annual HC/RC reports, ERF and CHF annual reports and data provided by selected UN agencies and INGOs.

^v Based on data from UN OCHA FTS.

^{vi} USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance.

^{vii} www.theebha.org/start-fund

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN WORKING WITH LOCAL NGOS IN HUMANITARIAN AID: HOW TO ENSURE RESPECT FOR HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS

THE ISSUE - WHOSE EMERGENCY IS IT ANYWAY ? THE ROLE OF LOCAL ACTORS

‘This mixture of concerns, interests, suspicion and opportunism can lead to a disregard for the humanitarian principles, and to potential reluctance on behalf of INGOs to partner up.’

 Humanitarian actions for both local NGOs and INGOsⁱ are supposed to be predominantly defined by the principles of impartiality, neutrality, humanity and independence.

However, these global standards are often a challenge even for highly experienced INGOs, and even more so for many local NGOs. Undeniably, local NGOs experience myriads of challenges which can include but are not limited to poor governance, communication, networking, lack of funds, absence of strategic planning, limited capacities and a “welfare approach” rather than a rights-based approach to the raging poverty levels in their areas of operation. Many local NGOs have different priorities and different mandates and missions. Their visions are often flexible to match that of the potential donor, because they lack stable funding and because of the general competitiveness to access funding. Their actions can also appear to be ad hoc and based on personalities rather than needs. Some also find themselves in a state of relative deprivation towards INGOs, accusing INGOs of creating unfair competition and holding back their development, for example by ‘robbing’ the best staff. This mixture of concerns, interests, suspicion and opportunism can lead to a disregard for the humanitarian principles and to potential reluctance on behalf of INGOs to partner up. However, despite these challenges, there is a growing need for continued dialogue, engagement and collaboration to identify an effective approach to reduce human suffering.

Therefore, FinnChurchAid (FCA) also recognizes the opportunities of working with local NGOs and seeks to address these challenges. Many local NGOs enjoy community acceptance, are embedded in local/regional networks, rely on local volunteers, government acceptance and have wide access to the persons in need of assistance. To capitalize on this, partnership with FCA enables local NGOs to access operation/programme funds, technical support and support for institutional capacity building. FCA’s approach also includes partners in issue-based advocacy initiatives, enhancing local networking and seeking to address the structural causes of poverty, inequity and injustice.

FCA’s collaboration and capacity building methods are based on needs as identified by each partner, whose capacity can vary greatly. Rather than organizing big workshops, FCA believes in everyday close cooperation and team work as well as regular personalized one-on-one contact with the partner organization’s staff. The accompaniment approach (*approach of close cooperation and capacity building*) with partners revolves around humanitarian principles and adherence to internationally recognized humanitarian standards such as the Sphere handbook, HAP and INEEⁱⁱ. FCA technical experts positioned throughout the region make themselves available upon request by partners for tailor-made support. In addition, FCA is able to draw upon the support of its extensive networks globally and utilize its own humanitarian expert roster to fast-track recruitments for specialized services and capacity building. FCA recognizes that such an approach of accompaniment is cyclical in nature and therefore does not have an end.

It is through partnership with local NGOs that FCA has also been able to ensure coherence with community policies in the area of humanitarian aid and development, including linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD), disaster risk reduction and preparedness strategies. Detailed and locally produced participatory needs assessments shape FCA’s specific crisis responses, drawing on valuable operational expertise and working closely with implementing partners. The community leads the way and their contribution is taken seriously in decision-making processes. Through partnering with local NGOs, FCA is also able to carry out humanitarian activities in many politically sensitive situations and access areas which could otherwise not be accessible. FCA will therefore continue to promote close coordination between its own activities and those of our local partner NGOs, while seeking to help them with addressing challenges related to implementation of humanitarian principles and standards.

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Humanitarian Coordinator
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ⁱ International Non-Governmental Organisations

ⁱⁱ The Sphere handbook includes a Charter with the humanitarian principles and technical standards for humanitarian aid delivery. HAP (Humanitarian Accountability Partnership) aims to improve accountability to affected populations, while INEE (Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies) aims to improve education standards.

WORKING WITH LOCAL PARTNERS IN PALESTINE

THE ISSUE - WHOSE EMERGENCY IS IT ANYWAY ? THE ROLE OF LOCAL ACTORS

'Local partners make a fundamental contribution to successfully designing and implementing projects thanks to the knowledge of local socio-cultural dynamics, beneficiaries and operating environment'

 GVC came to Palestine in 1992 and since then it has been working with local partners and communities. Working with local partners may seem easy but working *effectively* with local partners is a different matter. In order to have a fruitful collaboration with local partners there has to be mutual trust and reciprocity. Therefore we decided to carefully select two local NGOs, the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC) and the Palestinian Hydrology Group (PHG) as partners, taking into account their roots in the community and the trust they enjoyed with the local communities. The idea was that this would allow GVC to forge a closer relationship with beneficiaries and to gain a better understanding of their needs and problems; a hope which really materialised. Our partnership with UAWC and PHG changed in the course of time and now involves not only project implementation but also the sharing of methodologies and strategies to be applied in emergency and development work, how to bridge emergency to development, and how to connect the different Areas in OPT. Working with these organisations is now a cornerstone of GVC's country strategy.

At the same time, working with local partners can sometimes be challenging. Given the political context, local partners can be obstructed in or prevented from carrying out their project activities related to human rights. This of course has consequences for the whole project implementation and achievement of objectives. Furthermore, difficulties can arise when priorities for a project identified by local organizations are driven by previously consolidated relationships with local communities, diverging from GVC's view of the needs. The consequent phase of negotiating priorities can result into a compromise which is not always fully matching the expectations. Finally, there can be issues related to visibility. All organisations need to be visible in field, also because of donor requirements. However, as the local organisation is in more direct contact with beneficiaries, the local partner is sometimes identified not just as implementing agency but rather as donor, neglecting the international actors' participation to the project and therefore compromising their visibility. Despite these challenges, we think working with local NGOs is crucial.

Other partners include informal organisations like local community organisations (e.g. local committees, cooperatives, CBOs) as well as local governments. These partnerships give GVC the

chance to get more involved in local dynamics and can help in smoothing the implementation of project activities by acting as an interface with the local population. They are also often helpful in channeling information from regional and national level, deepening our knowledge of the country's socio-economic and political situation. Furthermore they can trigger the establishment of further relationships with other national stakeholders.

In accordance with our strategy in Palestine, all our interventions have an integrated local development approach, and the involvement of local authorities and communities in planning and monitoring activities is paramount for a sound ownership process. Participation of the authorities is requested in formal structures like steering committees, and Local Working Groups (LWG) are established in each of the local communities targeted by the project. The LWG is made up of representatives of the local public institutions, civil society and private sector, and chaired by the Mayor. The LWG is a technical working group with which GVC shares project work plans, it is involved in mapping of needs, monitoring project activities at local level and in helping solving bottlenecks that may hinder implementation. For example, in the case of a sewage system to be built in one village, some of the inhabitants were afraid that their houses would be damaged by the excavation. The LWG successfully acted as mediator between the inhabitants and the project, involving the Ministry of Public Works who proposed concrete technical steps to prevent such a problem.

At field level, in both humanitarian and development settings, local partners make a fundamental contribution to successfully designing and implementing projects thanks to the knowledge of local socio-cultural dynamics, beneficiaries and operating environment. In delivering humanitarian aid their role is probably even more important than ours, especially vis-à-vis their interaction with local beneficiaries in contexts which are often very sensitive from a cultural and religious point of view. In the development framework, the duration of the intervention is longer and allows for a more strategic involvement of local partners which is key to contextualising external aid inputs, whether technical assistance or innovative practices.

Luca De Filicaia
Head of mission in the oPt
GVC

<http://eng.gvc-italia.org/>

ⁱ Community Based Organisations.

INTERVIEW WITH COHAFA CHAIR ROSITA ŠORYTĖ

VIEW ON THE EU

Rosita Šorytė became the Chair of the Council Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid on 1 July 2013, at the start of the Lithuanian presidency of the Council of the European Union. Ms. Šorytė is Counsellor of the Development Coordination Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania.

This interview by Inge Brees (VOICE) took place on September 16.

CURRENTLY YOU ARE CHAIRING THE MEETINGS OF THE COUNCIL WORKING PARTY ON HUMANITARIAN AID AND FOOD AID (COHAFA), UNITING THE HUMANITARIAN EXPERTS OF THE MEMBER STATES. HOW DO YOU SEE THE ROLE OF COHAFA VIS-À-VIS OTHER PARTS OF THE COUNCIL AND EU INSTITUTIONS?

I first participated in these meetings when it was still a Food Assistance Committee. In 2007 we started to consider setting up a working group on humanitarian aid as there were many working groups but none dealing with humanitarian aid. COHAFA fills this gap and has an important added value.

We had some problems of passing messages between different working groups, but as a Chair I feel that recently the communication and coordination whenever necessary with other working groups is improved and going quite well. None of this is written down in formal procedures but it is very much about added value and complementarity.

THE EUROPEAN CONSENSUS ON HUMANITARIAN AID IS THE MAIN POLICY DOCUMENT FOR EU HUMANITARIAN AID, SIGNED BY THE MEMBER STATES, THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT. ITS ACTION PLAN JUST CAME TO AN END. HOW DO YOU SEE THE FUTURE?

The Consensus is a guiding document for all Member States and the Commission. If you take, for instance, the Regulation for EU Aid Volunteers which is currently being negotiated between the European Council and the Parliament, both institutions consider that the Consensus constitutes the basis of European humanitarian aid.

Regarding the Action Plan, we have to ask ourselves which kind of document is best to ensure practical and effective implementation of the Consensus. If a new Action Plan is the best tool, then we should go for it. Currently Commission and Member States together with all stakeholders are in the process of assessing the best way forward.

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTING THE CONSENSUS?

The Consensus gives us a set of norms and guiding principles for delivering the humanitarian aid. I believe that the Member States very seriously follow these principles. The Consensus is the basis, the frame of, I would say, the European humanitarian identity. I am certain that we all fully adhere to the principles set out in the Consensus but in certain extreme circumstances such as armed conflict situations or states' denial of the need of humanitarian aid, we can be faced with very difficult choices regardless of our convictions or goodwill. Let's take Syria as an example where the conditions for the delivery of aid are dictated by those who control the territory. The EU keeps reminding all parties to the conflict of the obligation to respect International Humanitarian Law, to protect civilians and to facilitate unimpeded access for humanitarian workers to people in need. But, at the end of the day, if they do not respect international law, we have to make difficult choices on what can be done in order to reach people who desperately need our assistance.

THE EU IS CURRENTLY DEVELOPING ITS 'COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH' TOWARDS CONFLICT-AFFECTED STATES. WHAT ARE THE MOST PERTINENT ISSUES TO WATCH ON THIS ISSUE WITH REGARD TO HUMANITARIAN AID?

It is very important that the EU should efficiently use all the policy instruments at its disposal and sends coherent messages abroad. Nevertheless, we should keep in mind that humanitarian aid must not become one of the tools in the main tool box. Therefore we should seek to achieve a certain culture of cooperation between various institutions of the EU, enhance information sharing but try to avoid a subordination of humanitarian aid to other instruments. For the time being we are waiting for a draft text of a Communication on the Comprehensive Approach which is being prepared by the European External Action Service. When we see the draft, we can discuss further the possible modalities of the concept.

VIEW ON THE EU

ONE OF THE PRIORITIES OF THE LITHUANIAN PRESIDENCY IS THE WORK AROUND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION (DRR). WHAT CAN EU MEMBER STATES DO TO ENSURE DRR BECOMES A REALITY IN DISASTER-VULNERABLE COUNTRIES?

In my understanding, DRR is directly related to resilience. As humanitarians are very much on the ground and dealing with emergencies that are very often have cyclical in nature and have a predictable character, they have pushed policy makers very hard to rethink their modus operandi. Practitioners recommended seeking increased cooperation between development and humanitarian actors at all levels: from policy makers to programming of projects to implementation on the ground. This year finally we had a major breakthrough from discussions to real action: after a joint Communication from two European Commission departments – development and humanitarian aid -, an Action Plan was formulated and now a joint letter to all EU delegations abroad invites all humanitarian and development actors to cooperate and coordinate on the ground. Even though this coordination looks so obvious and simple, it was not so simple on the ground, where humanitarians and development people have separate budget lines, people, work tables and even contacts. The invitation to communicate on the ground from the start and then jointly prepare strategies and plan programmes and projects is a very important first practical step to be taken. If finally we – the EU – start to communicate and coordinate at all levels, it will be a major change in our mind-set and if we can improve our work culture, then we will see improvements on the resilience agenda, including on DRR.

THE COHAFSA AIMS TO IMPROVE COORDINATION ON HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS BETWEEN MEMBER STATES. THIS IS A CHALLENGING TASK GIVEN THE WIDE VARIETY IN CAPACITY AND RESOURCES BETWEEN MEMBER STATES. AS THE CHAIR, HOW CAN YOU CONTRIBUTE TO INCREASING OPERATIONAL COORDINATION DESPITE THESE DIFFERENCES?

Currently operational coordination is not yet very strong between Member States and the Commission. For the time being we exchange information on the amounts of funds provided, rather than having an in-depth exchange of

information on who is doing what. But with the crisis in and around Syria, we are becoming more aware than ever of the need to seek a more comprehensive exchange of information. That is one of the challenges ahead of us and we have to find ways to achieve that goal.

FOR THOSE EU COUNTRIES WHICH ARE RELATIVELY NEW AS HUMANITARIAN DONORS, WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES?

Perhaps there is some homework to do. For some of us, we should adapt our existing humanitarian aid capabilities towards, as I would call it, a European “culture” of delivery of humanitarian aid, respecting the principles of professionalism, complementarity and added value. For instance, in Lithuania we don't have any NGOs specialised in the delivery of humanitarian aid and we spend our humanitarian budget, which is still very modest, through international organisations such as OCHA, WFP or UNHCR.

In the light of the future implementation of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative, it is important that EU legislation ensures that Member States can join this initiative once they have their own capabilities in place. For example, Lithuania does not have any NGOs that could become a sending organisation at this point in time, but we will make sure to have options open in the Regulation, so we can participate in the future.

HOW DO YOU FEEL THE EU IS DOING IN SYRIA?

The situation is very dramatic. I would say that we are doing the best we can in extremely difficult circumstances. The biggest challenge that we all face, including the NGO community, is that we cannot finance only one crisis. Many other crises in the world need our imminent attention and help. The solution must be found at the political level, but so far we are not close to a resolution. So, we must keep reminding people about the dramatic humanitarian situation, and the obligation for all parties to the conflict to respect in full International Humanitarian Law, protect civilians and allow unimpeded access of humanitarian aid. That is the message of COHAFSA, of the European Union, and the entire international community.

“THE REBELS CAME AT NIGHT.”
WHY CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC IS STILL
THE WORLD’S MOST SERIOUS FORGOTTEN CRISIS

FIELD FOCUS

‘Safely accessing those in critical need of assistance is now the top priority for humanitarian agencies.’

‘CAR is the second most underfunded humanitarian emergency among the UN’s aid appeals.’

★ The Central African Republic (CAR), already one of the world’s poorest countries, currently faces a complex humanitarian and political crisis which threatens to destabilise the whole region. On 24 March 2013, the rebel coalition, Seleka, took control of the capital Bangui and overthrew President Bozize. The takeover plunged the country into a renewed era of turmoil and despair. Looting, rape, recruitment of child soldiers, arbitrary killings, roadblocks, and kidnapping are now widespread.

“The rebels came at night. They looted everything; house by house. Everyone tried to run into the bush; those who couldn’t escape in time were attacked. People were killed, injured, and abducted, including women and girls. Everything was destroyed. The village is now completely empty. I will never return there,” says Jean Christophⁱ from Bani village in eastern CAR.

More than 60,000 people have fled the violence to neighboring countries and at least 206,000 people have been internally displaced. Jean Christoph continues: *“Life in the bush is very difficult. We just sleep under the trees and we have to forage for food. We have no clothes, no water, no cooking equipment, no medicines.”*

The humanitarian crisis in CAR is now amongst the most severe anywhere in the world. The NGOs still operating there, including International Medical Corps (IMC), face almost overwhelming challenges. Today UN OCHA estimates more than 1.6 million people, half of them children, are in dire need of humanitarian assistance.

★ **A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS**

Even before the recent political upheaval, health provision in CAR was over-stretched and under-resourced, falling far below the needs of the population. Life expectancy, child mortality and HIV rates are among the worst in the world, and there is only one medical doctor for every 55,000 inhabitants.

The conflict has exacerbated this dire situation. Health facilities were looted and vandalized; health supplies and essential medicines could not travel beyond the capital; and many health workers, afraid for their own safety, stayed away from hospitals and clinics. United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Ivan Simonovic, has warned that less than 20% of the country’s health services are currently operational. The number of deaths from water-related illnesses, diarrhea and malaria are rapidly increasing, particularly among young children.

Hunger and malnutrition are also increasing problems in CAR as food reserves have been looted, cattle stolen and farmers are afraid to return to their fields. A recent Emergency Food Security Assessment by UN OCHA revealed that 484,000 people (10% of the population) are at risk of food insecurity.

Safely accessing those in critical need of assistance is now the top priority for humanitarian agencies. The unstable security situation has consistently undermined relief efforts and the rainy season from May until September has further damaged the dilapidated road network making access to vulnerable populations even more difficult. Funding is also extremely limited; CAR is the second most underfunded humanitarian emergency among the UN’s aid appeals, with only 32% of requested funds received to date.

Despite these challenges, IMC has remained one of only two international organisations working in the north-eastern regions of Vakaga and Haute-Kotto. Thanks to funding from ECHOⁱⁱ, IMC has continued to provide primary health care, maternal and child health services and treatment and prevention of malnutrition to internally displaced people, refugees and communities affected by the conflict. True to our mission of providing communities with the training and knowledge to take care of their own health, we also educate people on sanitation and hygiene; HIV/AIDS prevention; gender-based violence and child protection. In recent weeks, IMC has even expanded the reach of its mobile clinics to include 11 new communities, some of which have not had access to any form of health care for years.

The priority for the international community must now be to fully fund the CAR humanitarian appeal and to engage politically at every possible level to create a stable and lasting peace. It may be easy to ignore what is happening in CAR, but the suffering of its people and the risk that an unstable and lawless country poses to the security of the whole region, make that a cruel and dangerous policy.

Everybody working in CAR hopes that the recent visit by the EU Humanitarian Aid Commissioner, Kristalina Georgieva, and UN Humanitarian Chief, Valerie Amos, will keep CAR at the top of the international community’s agenda. Only by speaking out about the immense humanitarian needs here will governments feel the pressure to allocate adequate resources to respond to the crisis gripping the country. The lives of people like Jean Christoph and his family depend upon it.

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ⁱ Names have been changed for security reasons.

ⁱⁱ The humanitarian and civil protection department of the European Commission.

HUMANITARIAN ISSUES AT EU LEVEL

VOICE AT WORK

★ VOICE members launch a resolution on the EU Comprehensive Approach

At the last General Assembly VOICE members adopted a resolution on the EU process that should lead to integrated strategies for its external action, called the 'comprehensive approach'. This approach seeks to integrate diplomacy, defence and development into one coordinated strategy. In the resolution the network puts forward recommendations that seek to ensure that the model chosen for the EU Comprehensive Approach respects the humanitarian principles (humanity, impartiality, independence, neutrality), as committed to in the Lisbon Treaty and the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. VOICE seeks to raise awareness of politicians and decision makers to ensure that better coordination of EU foreign policy through an EU comprehensive approach does not undermine the humanitarian objective. What is important is ensuring that humanitarians are included in the analysis from the start of common planning, that any strategy is adapted to the context, and that communications ensure a clear distinction between security and political objectives on the one hand, and humanitarian objectives on the other.

★ Giving recommendations for the post-2015 framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

2013 is a key year in the development of the next international framework for reducing disaster risk; a significant milestone took place in May via the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction. VOICE members developed recommendations in a series of VOICE papers on DRR. The series aimed to raise awareness among politicians and decision makers on key elements that need to be taken into account in the development of the next Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA). Many VOICE members participated in the Global Platform and welcomed the space given to civil society and the fact that many common NGO messages were included in the Chair's Summary. Through its DRR Working Group, VOICE will keep engaging in this process, for example by ensuring NGO input to the European regional consultation towards the next HFA. In addition, DRR needs to be embedded in the Post-2015 Development Agenda; a fundamental message to continuously repeat.

★ News from the network

VOICE is pleased to welcome its new member ADRA Czech Republic. ADRA Czech Republic is part of the ADRA international network operating in over 120 countries. ADRA CZ was established in 1992 and it currently belongs among leading relief agencies in the Czech Republic providing humanitarian, development and social assistance at home and abroad.

★ News from the members

- Norwegian Refugee Council and OCHA commissioned a study of the "[the Impact of Donor Counter-Terrorism Measures on Principled Humanitarian Action](#)", which also presents practical recommendations both for donors and humanitarian actors.
- Plan UK's report, "[Girls Education Under Attack](#)", describes the increasing risks to girls' education due to emergencies and conflict and makes recommendations for ensuring no child misses out on their right to education.
- Save the Children collaborated with the Food Economy Group on a report "[Reducing the risk of disasters and adapting to climate change](#)" which provides an evidence-based perspective from the Household Economy Analysis- database, in the face of growing interest to support households, communities, and nations to be resilient in the face of disasters.
- World Vision UK's latest report, together with World Vision Lebanon, '[Under pressure](#)', looks at the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on host communities in Lebanon.



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VOICE out loud

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