

25  
years

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FOCUS  
MOVING FORWARD WITH THE AGENDA FOR HUMANITY

As VOICE celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> birthday, and we mark the first anniversary of the World Humanitarian Summit, VOICE has invited members and others to contribute on some of the key themes shaping humanitarian action. With contributions from members in Sweden, France, Spain, UK, Belgium as well as reflections from Nepal, the Central African Republic and the peacebuilding community, this edition of the VOICE out loud continues to celebrate the diversity of the network as well as its members' field experience and expertise.

The coming year will mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Principles of Partnership and with the European Commission launching an evaluation of the performance of its own humanitarian assistance, this edition can hopefully contribute to the reflections on those processes and milestones.






VOICE

VOICE stands for 'Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies'. VOICE is a network of 85 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in humanitarian aid worldwide. VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor on EU humanitarian affairs and disaster risk reduction and it promotes the values of humanitarian NGOs.

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## FROM THE VOICE PRESIDENT



The VOICE network turns 25 this year and I have begun reflecting on what has been accomplished in my 5 years as President so far. The biggest challenge and achievement has undoubtedly been the battle to secure sufficient funding for ECHO in 2014. This mobilised and united the entire membership. Some other highlights include the negotiation and entry into force of a new FPA, a new EU multiannual framework budget (MFF) and the series of international conferences and summits that brought VOICE's work to the global level over the past two years. All these challenges have changed the organisation, increasing the volume of members and diversity of outreach, alliances and engagement.

The last years leading to the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul were built with hope of driving a new, or rejuvenated humanitarian agenda. Of the many aspirations and commitments, some crucial aspects are still left sadly neglected – peacebuilding/conflict prevention and the prevalence of IHL abuse, to name but two. This edition shows how the momentum on some issues, cash, localisation and the Grand Bargain for instance, is being maintained. In this 25<sup>th</sup> edition of the VOICE Out Loud, what I note is the continuing relevance of so many of the themes addressed over the magazine's early years, even whilst the global and EU context shifts and changes; LRRD (now known as 'the nexus between humanitarian and development'), diversity of NGOs, accountability, security, independence, partnership, refugees, funding... As you can see from our members' contributions – and NGOs' commitments at the Summit last year- the recommendations and expertise to build on are plenty, but tragically, is it not on implementation that further progress is sorely missing?

As for the immediate future an important new reflection has begun – the Commission has opted to take on its own 5-year 'meta-evaluation' of its humanitarian assistance. The intention is to build into its conclusions, some recommendations for better integration of its Agenda for Humanity and Grand Bargain commitments into its policy and operations. Conclusions of this will hopefully coincide with the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. The Consensus remains the best regional framework policy for humanitarian assistance in the world – and reflects many of the themes that were then further expanded in the Agenda for Humanity and Grand Bargain. I hope the EC will also take stock and celebrate ECHO's achievements in its evaluation conclusions. As already noted in the evaluation of the Consensus' implementation a few years ago: its reputation as a 'global reference donor in humanitarian assistance' is not only due to the volume of aid and the value for money it brings, but also because of its field network, its expertise, its policy on forgotten crises, its consistent support to needs-based and principled humanitarian assistance and its diversity of partners. In short, its ability to deliver quality and effective assistance through its partners. As I said above, there is always room for improvements and areas that are trickier to implement than others, but I hope that in all the transformations to come these essential assets will be preserved, and that the actions of 2012-2016 will not only be measured against the current strive to further improve effectiveness and efficiency.

As ECHO prepares for its future so does the EU. With Brexit negotiations kicking off, deepening political uncertainty in Europe, and the EC preparing to make proposals for another new MFF from 2020 – I wish I were more confident than I am of the EU's resolve to maintain its ambition to be a leading global donor. The current MFF has not allowed the EU to increase its support to crisis-affected populations to a degree commensurate with the increased scale of crises. Other donors – including individual member states – have grown their humanitarian assistance budgets, but the reality is that the gap between needs and means to address them is growing faster. Meanwhile the field context for access to humanitarian assistance is widely perceived as getting more complex, not less.

In short, as we ceaselessly, and demonstratively, continue to improve the quality of our assistance, key elements of a more satisfactory humanitarian response are beyond NGOs' control. After 25 years, VOICE strives all the more to continue to be of service to its members by promoting the values of the network and the role of humanitarian NGOs (in the first instance by sharing our views for this EC evaluation). It will also continue to support, encourage and, when possible, even nudge the European Union to live up to its values and the humanitarian imperative that drives us all.

**Nicolas Borsinger**  
VOICE President

# WHY WE PROBABLY NEED THE HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES MORE THAN EVER

THE ISSUE – MOVING FORWARD WITH THE AGENDA FOR HUMANITY

★ Last year at the World Humanitarian Summit, the importance of the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence and of their universality across cultures and regions was reaffirmed. Participants from all over the world highlighted their role in enabling access in the most difficult environments, helping focus on those most in need and contributing to protecting aid workers.

Still, the multiplication of protracted, mainly man-made, conflict-driven crises, and the increase in the magnitude of needs all over the world is stretching the humanitarian system like never before. While it is already struggling with a significant surge in forced displacement and huge operations in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, famine is now looming in four other countries, with unprecedented levels of hunger in Yemen, north-eastern Nigeria, Somalia and South Sudan.

Incapacity and unwillingness from world leaders to resolve conflicts or simply to allow unimpeded access to humanitarian aid is a global challenge. But the response is also influenced by political interests driving foreign aid policies, as seen in the UN Security Council impasse on Syria or in the response to the needs of populations in camps caught up in global power play on the Jordanian border, the lack of media attention to forgotten crises like CAR or Yemen, and by national publics' increasing reticence to overseas spending.

In this context, maintaining and promoting a response based on humanitarian principles is a challenge, but it is a challenge worth taking up.

## ★ WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT FOR OUR ORGANISATIONS' OPERATIONS/ACTIVITIES IN THE FIELD?

Humanitarian principles define what humanitarian aid is: delivering life-saving assistance to those in need without any adverse distinction. They distinguish humanitarian aid from other activities, for example those of political, religious, ideological or military nature. The first principle, the principle of humanity, means that human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found, with particular attention to the most vulnerable in the population.

In almost all current crises, aid workers struggle to reach people due to security or other constraints. Remaining perceived as impartial and neutral is then essential to be able to negotiate access with the different parties in a conflict. Respect for impartiality also supports quality and good targeting; another essential element of trust needed to ensure access in volatile environments. Respecting principles is a collective endeavour, as while occasional compromises on the principles may grant temporary access, longer term it can also undermine the reputation and safety of other NGOs. Working

collectively to respect and implement them remains the best option to ensure populations caught in conflict have access to the aid they need.

## ★ IS IT ONLY THE DELIVERING AGENCIES' RESPONSIBILITY?

Today's biggest crises are the product of global political failure to protect populations, and trying to alleviate these levels of suffering is beyond agencies' control and mandate. Yet many NGOs still manage to get access to hard-to-reach areas to provide meaningful and dignified relief to people caught in conflicts.

To achieve this collectively, we, the humanitarian community, must put humanity and the humanitarian imperative at the heart of our activities, defend our financial and logistical independence, denounce attacks against our mission and values and build strong understanding of what principled response looks like.

The crisis is also visible through a financial lens. This year the UN launched its largest ever appeal for Yemen (\$2.1bn). It is requesting a record US\$21.6bn overall in 2017, of which only 22.3% is funded at this time<sup>1</sup>.

There are worries about the Trump administration's attempts to cut one to two-thirds of USAID's budget, the government's foreign aid agency. If passed, the cuts could threaten missions and worsen the migrant crisis.

ECHO has released funding this year of almost €1bn, of which almost 20% is dedicated to Greece, an EU Member State<sup>2</sup>. This situation, where availability of funds is also linked to political interests, or relies on repeated, continually underfunded appeals, and is tied to media attention rather than the humanitarian imperative and needs, cannot continue. Humanitarian NGOs depend on their institutional donors to contribute to promoting a principled humanitarian response through their actions, which include the choices behind allocations of funds, their proportionality, and the speeches and actions of their political representatives. We expect the European Commission and others to recommit to initiatives like the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD).

We need to uphold the principles, and above all the principle of humanity, at all levels. As a community we must be consistent in implementing them – and so must the donor community. It is a very simple fact that helping people in desperate need is a goal that surpasses all sorts of political considerations.

**Pauline Chetcuti,**  
Head of Humanitarian Advocacy and Policy  
Action contre la Faim - France  
[www.actioncontrelafaim.org](http://www.actioncontrelafaim.org)

1. <https://fts.unocha.org/>

2. <https://fts.unocha.org/donors/8523/summary/2017>

## MAINTAINING HUMANITY IN CASH ASSISTANCE

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*‘Caritas’ experience in Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon shows that cash can often be an effective tool, but only when it is linked with a very personal approach: no credit card or voucher system can replace interaction and dialogue with crisis-affected people.’*

★ In the avalanche of papers that has been produced around the Grand Bargain, WHS and cash assistance, one phrase keeps on ringing in my head: *the need to change the paradigm from a supply driven humanitarian system to a demand driven system*. At Caritas we are providing services to people in need; supply is a means. Our activities are triggered by our volunteers in parishes confronted by the misery faced by others. If you skip the proximity and empathy with victims of disasters, humanitarianism loses its sense. Then the phrase’s focus on “demand driven” introduces the idea that “the market” will provide the answer to the needs of victims. This is flawed from the beginning, since the same donors are asking us to link our efforts up with safety net programs, which exist precisely because some people do not share the benefits market systems provide others.

### ★ THE DEVELOPMENT OF CASH IN CRISES

Even at the onset of a humanitarian crisis, communities still possess capacities, and Caritas supports them as the first responders. We have a commitment to strengthening their capacities by purchasing local materials and trading with local companies. It is important to revive markets in crisis situations, and the Caritas network participated actively in the 2007 development of the MERS –Minimum Economic Recovery Standards. As part of the Sphere companionship model (since 2015 the Humanitarian Standards Partnership), we recognize the need for rapid, tailored support for the livelihoods, enterprises, and economies affected in the wake of a crisis. But you cannot expect “the market” to respond adequately to an outbreak of measles, based on the demand of the mothers of ailing children! We do not underestimate the need in emergency efforts to import technical personnel and their supplies to alleviate human suffering and meet basic needs for shelter, water, food, and health services when necessary.

It took a while for some donors to accept the transition from tendering for the bulk purchase of seeds, tools and NFI’s to the organization of seed and livestock fairs. The voucher system, e-vouchers and conditional cash were then smoothly and rightfully introduced. Monitoring & evaluation of these activities maintains proximity with the beneficiaries. Food for work, a remnant of the Food Aid Convention was changed into cash for work in ‘labour intensive’ projects (HIMO - *Haute Intensité de Main d’Oeuvre*.)

### ★ CURRENT CONTEXTS AND CASH

Without any doubt we have to take into account the fact that the humanitarian system is overstretched with more than 60 million refugees, and crises in Northern Nigeria, South Sudan, Yemen, Somalia and the Middle East, that the means are limited, and that *‘responses to humanitarian crisis should be effective and efficient...representing the best value for money’*. The overheads in the humanitarian sector are too heavy, and apart from the field cluster system, the Transformative Agenda of the UN did not deliver sufficient change in this regard.

Talk of the day to deliver this efficiency and effectiveness is now MPCBA, *multi-purpose cash based assistance*, which means that cash is the default option for humanitarian assistance.

### ★ CONCERNS ABOUT THE LATEST CASH APPROACH

We are afraid that the huge commitments to implement the MPCBA approach will take away important means to tackle necessary services in the realm of public health and social assistance: will the affected health system be able to cope with the increased needs? What about the WASH sector, decent shelter and education? Will all these services become subject to market dynamics?

There are other concerns: beneficiary selection, beneficiary privacy (especially with biometric registration methods), the global governance of the MPCBA system, and retaining proximity with our beneficiaries. If we are to communicate with our beneficiaries through cash machines, what about our leading humanitarian principle of Humanity? Caritas’ experience in Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon shows that cash can often be an effective tool, but only when it is linked with a very personal approach: no credit card or voucher system can replace interaction and dialogue with crisis-affected people. A banking system alone cannot identify specific vulnerabilities, uphold dignity, enhance ownership and accountability.

The ECHO/DFID Guidance to deliver medium to large-scale cash transfers from January 2017 tempered the enthusiasm of many of their partners about MPCBA, by giving the cash envelope to one actor. Although multi-purpose cash assistance carries the promise to cater for all the needs of victims of disasters, many services still need to be provided by humans.

Jan Weuts  
Emergency Aid Coordinator  
Caritas International – Belgium  
<http://www.caritasinternational.be>

## POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS FOR THE GRAND BARGAIN LOCALISATION AGENDA

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### THE CASE FOR LOCALISATION

Action Aid, CAFOD, CARE, Christian Aid, OXFAM and Tear Fund commissioned a series of studies to strengthen evidence on the use of local capacities in emergencies, under the label 'Missed Opportunities', in DRC, Haiti, Kenya, Pakistan, the Philippines, South Sudan and Nepal. Our research demonstrates that local capacity is being underutilised, overlooked and undervalued.

National and local actors have a deep understanding of context allowing them to shape programmes in contextually appropriate, culturally sensitive ways, based on communities' own understanding of needs. They can improve accountability to affected populations, through being close to communities; and facilitate a smoother transition through the disaster cycle.

In the international system, resilience, response and recovery actions can be undertaken by different actors, but local/national NGOs (NNGO) work in all these spaces. This enables them to enhance connectedness and ensure responses take place in ways that respect long term perspectives, through continued presence and ongoing engagement with communities.

And local presence enables partners to be first responders, getting to affected people before the international community arrives.

Meanwhile, the rise in number and complexity of emergencies means the international system is not capable of responding in all settings all the time, implying a need to strengthen local capacity.

One story from Haiti by way of illustration: a local Haiti NGO operated 10 fee paying health centres prior to the 2010 earthquake. A large international health NGO (INGO) arrived operating free mobile clinics. This caused the immediate closure of the local paying health centres. At the end of a one-year intervention, the INGO left. The local NGO was unable to recover resources to reopen their facilities, resulting in a net loss to the community.

responders' and 'as directly as possible'. INGOs have branches of different shapes and sizes in developing countries, populated largely by national staff, sometimes with bespoke national-level governance. National INGO offices do fantastic work and deserve great respect. But they are not starved of secure, sustainable and substantial financial resources in the way that non-affiliated home-grown smaller national and local NGOs and faith-based organisations are. If resources channeled to Christian Aid Nicaragua or OXFAM Kenya were classed as direct funding to local responders, the Grand Bargain would be less transformational.

A second definitional challenge is whether in-kind contributions – e.g. food - count toward the 25%. The spirit of WHS implies a future where, respecting the Principles of Partnership, national front-line responders are treated as equal partners, not sub-contractors. In-kind contributions tend to imply a sub-contractual vision. If one includes in-kind, many large agencies already surpass the 25% target – so would have to change nothing to meet it. Surely what the Grand Bargain intends is meaningful change?

Another vital Grand Bargain commitment is a 'participation revolution'. Putting people affected by disaster front and centre of decisions affecting their lives is critical. To date, reform efforts focus on shifting power to national civil society and government. Less work has been done on how survivors can be supported to take a lead in shaping responses themselves. Yet the first – and most important – responders are disaster affected communities themselves. Look out for the inspirational [Local2Global Protection Initiative's](#) ideas on how we can support effective, rapid and scalable survivor-led crisis response better.

### ★ THE GRAND BARGAIN ON HUMANITARIAN FINANCING

One of the most prominent themes of the Grand Bargain is the commitment to 'more support and funding tools for local and national responders', including achieving '*by 2020 a global, aggregated target of at least 25% of humanitarian funding to local and national responders as directly as possible*'. This is potentially transformative, depending on how it is interpreted and whether it is delivered. Direct funding to national actors currently stands at 0.4%.

The International Federation of the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement (IFRC) and Switzerland currently lead a working group to move the Grand Bargain localisation agenda forward. Key work includes:

- reform of pooled funding mechanisms that enable more direct funding to local actors
- greater resourcing for capacity building for local actors
- a localisation marker to measure progress

There is controversy over how the international community defines 'local and national

### ★ DONOR PRACTICES TO SUPPORT LOCALISATION

Current donor trends do not yet facilitate early delivery of Grand Bargain localisation commitments. Donors may need to reform some centralised, risk-averse programmatic requirements that inhibit the humanitarian system from working with and reinforcing local capacities:

- Administrative cost pressures lead donors to reduce in-house capacity and outsource transaction costs to intermediaries. This favours large-scale interventions, reinforcing the dominance of small numbers of large agencies.



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- Simple practicalities block local access to funding:
  - donors fail to translate documents into appropriate working languages - and fail to publicise funding opportunities where NNGOs will see them.
  - Restricted time-frames inhibit NNGO response.
  - Minimum grant sizes preclude or discourage smaller NNGOs applying.
  
- Linear thinking stifles innovation and risk. Increasing scrutiny of aid budgets encourages donors to emphasize outcomes and payment by results and in arrears. Donor programme planning approaches imply an unrealistic linear relationship between inputs, activities and results which does not resonate with experience in implementation in the uncertain arena of humanitarian response. The need for certainty of results stifles risk-taking and innovation. These approaches suit large actors, who can manage cash flow and financial uncertainty better. Donors should be willing to accept more calculated risk if it allows faster response.

To deliver on the Grand Bargain localisation agenda, we need increased and more flexible funding for strategic capacity support to national organisations, including to strengthen skills in accessing and managing funds. We need to ensure that due diligence procedures are proportional to the NNGOs contribution; and to develop simplified partner capacity assessments to access funds rapidly.

★ **THE START NETWORK - AN EXAMPLE OF FACILITATING ACCESS TO FINANCING**

We need mechanisms to facilitate access to financing for national civil society. The Start Fund is an example, with half its funding going to local actors (and exceptional speed in reaching them).

DFID through its £40m Disasters and Emergencies Preparedness Programme (DEPP) is strengthening the ability of NNGOs in 10 countries to respond. The DEPP funds three flagship leading-edge programmes ('Shifting the Power', 'Financial Enablers' and 'Transforming Surge Capacity') by coalitions of Start Network agencies to develop best practice in capacity-building of local and national partners. Further details can be found on the [Start Network website](#).

The Start Network is looking to set up a new Window of the Start Fund for national and

local NGOs. The programmes led by Action Aid and OXFAM, are strengthening the capacity of NNGOs in Bangladesh, DRC, Ethiopia, Kenya, Pakistan and Philippines. Since Start members work closely with, know well, and are already investing in strengthening this group of NNGOs, Start's NNGO Window proposal would start with these partners as a manageable pilot to learn from. The Start Fund model would be used to avoid reinventing the wheel.

★ **CHARTER FOR CHANGE - AN EXAMPLE OF INGOs COMMITMENTS**

29 INGOs have signed [Charter4Change](#), an 8-point plan for engaging more effectively with partners, including an undertaking to channel at least 20% of humanitarian funding through NNGOs. Other commitments include clearer reporting of funding flows to partners, including for capacity building, support to their administrative expenses, and compensation if we contract NNGO staff. It will be a great step forward if Charter for Change signatories honour these commitments, and if other INGOs join us.

★ **THE ROLE OF ECHO**

ECHO is to be congratulated for its energetic leadership in Grand Bargain circles. The determination of former Commissioner Kristalina Georgieva was instrumental in getting the Grand Bargain off the ground.

ECHO's current Humanitarian Aid Regulation does not allow direct funding of local organisations. Given that the Grand Bargain demands more funding to local actors as directly as possible, ECHO might wish to re-examine it to reflect the changing post-WHS humanitarian landscape.

ECHO is currently looking to support the Grand Bargain localisation agenda via the Enhanced Response Capacities Humanitarian Implementation Plan - this is a very welcome contribution. It is an encouraging sign that ECHO have established a new position to lead on progressing the localisation agenda within ECHO. I hope VOICE can support ECHO to find the best ways forward for ECHO on these issues.

**Michael Mosselmans,**  
**Head of Humanitarian Policy and Practice**  
**and Humanitarian Programmes in Latin America**  
**and the Caribbean,**  
**Christian Aid, member of the ACT Alliance**  
[www.christianaid.org.uk](http://www.christianaid.org.uk)

# EUROPEAN FUNDING AND CONDITIONS FOR HUMANITARIAN NGOs IN THE YEARS TO COME

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VOICE promotes the added value of NGOs as the main implementers of humanitarian assistance in the field, expressing European public solidarity with crisis affected people. This also involves ensuring that the funding and funding conditions for EU humanitarian assistance enable European humanitarian NGOs, in their full diversity, to continue to be able to save lives in the worst crisis affected places in the world.

VOICE members' have built their knowledge of how to influence these EU processes over the years, engaging with the European Parliament, and at national level with the public and government ministries. This helps VOICE to ensure that the EU rules and regulations related to funding help EU humanitarian NGOs to focus on quality assistance to crisis affected people.

## ★ WHAT WILL SHAPE HUMANITARIAN NGOs FUNDING AT EU LEVEL IN YEARS TO COME?

For the next few years, what financial and legal instruments the EU will have available as a whole, will be a battleground that shapes the EU's role in the world. The 2016-2018 period includes a series of EU negotiations which will all have an impact on future European funding conditions for humanitarian actors. The bigger picture is that the EU finds itself dealing with the outcomes of a series of international agendas (agenda for humanity, humanitarian financing, climate change, sustainable development ...), increasing humanitarian needs globally, facing a likely smaller future budget because of Brexit, a shifting EU foreign policy and aid architecture, with migration as the disruptive elephant in the room, absorbing funding and challenging the EU to live up to its values.

## ★ LESSONS FROM THE CURRENT MFF

In the current context, it's a challenge for the EU to articulate what it needs for the future, but the new MFF provides the most room for fresh thinking. The EU could here make progress on bridging between humanitarian and development aid, or on multi-year planning/funding in protracted humanitarian crises. What VOICE has observed is that the inflexibility in the current MFF has limited the EU's ability to respond to scale, to the increasing humanitarian needs over the years since 2013. Every year the budget is negotiated within MFF limits, and nowhere near the increases the situation on the ground in many countries would justify – often to the frustration of at least parts of the EU's budgetary authority. Member States and the European Parliament want to respond visibly to specific crises, like Ebola, Syria or Yemen but from a humanitarian perspective this could come at a cost to other less visible crises or drive the EU to seek efficiencies in other humanitarian operations, at any cost.

## FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK AND INSTRUMENTS OF THE EU

- **The European Commission's (EC) financial regulation:** the overarching document which provides a general framework of rules under which DG ECHO (or any other DG) will define the specific rules related to the contractual arrangements with implementing partners.
- **MFF 2020– onwards:** The multiannual financial framework (MFF) is a framework budget for the EU agreed by the Member States and European Parliament, providing the basis and limits on which each year the actual annual budget is negotiated. In the uncertainty over the terms of the UK exit from the Union, and the corresponding implications for the EU's budget, the Commission will have to propose a new multiannual financial framework (MFF). Different ideas, such as shortening the cycle from 7 to 5 years to reflect the EU's parliamentary and commission political lifecycle, a bigger or smaller budget, and restructuring the budget headings and lines completely, exist.
- **FPA negotiation:** the Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) that governs the relations between DG ECHO and its humanitarian NGO implementing partners is due to be renegotiated in 2017-2018.

The multitude of EU instruments which regulate the amounts and functioning of EU funding for humanitarian NGOs, directly affect the quantity and quality of funding that they can receive. To deliver for crisis affected people, the funding needs to be **timely** – people's needs and crises cannot wait, and most organisations cannot shoulder the risk of fronting large sums with no guarantee of a contract to follow or make commitments to crisis affected people they will not be able to live up to. The funding should be **predictable** – many needs are foreseen or protracted and can be planned for. They need to be **flexible** enough for NGOs to adapt to changes on the ground and bridge better with development and peacebuilding funds. And they should be allocated on the basis on vulnerability, risk and capacity analyses to ensure they are **needs-based** so that donors and humanitarian actors alike respect the most basic humanitarian principles of humanity and impartiality.

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**The Grand Bargain** is a concrete outcome of the 2015-2016 High-Level Panel on humanitarian financing. Donors and implementing agencies have high expectations that it will deliver some key outcomes in effectiveness and efficiency in the humanitarian ecosystem in a very short timeframe. Its key themes include simplification, localisation, multi-year planning and funding, cash, transparency and needs assessment. ECHO has taken a leading role in its facilitation group. In June, the first anniversary will take stock of progress.

We know there is a strong humanitarian case for more money: conflict, climate change related disasters and their complex interlinkages are not going away soon. The continued need for needs-based and principled humanitarian funding means VOICE will call for specific humanitarian funding in the next MFF.

What humanitarian NGOs also would like to see in the next MFF is sufficient flexibility. This flexibility should be about operational responses to changing needs on the ground and to bridge gaps with peacebuilding and development funds to ensure sustainability.

### ★ REVISION OF THE EC'S FINANCIAL REGULATION

Last year, the EC proposed a revision of this regulation, which included some key measures for simplification of the EC's rules and reporting, which are some of the most difficult in the world for NGOs. Member States and the European Parliament have here the opportunity to help ensure more effective and efficient use of EU resources. Without this in the financial regulation, full implementation of the Grand Bargain for ECHO and its partners, will be very difficult.

A new Framework Partnership Agreement with many of DG ECHO's partners will be negotiated over the next year or so. NGOs see the potential for positive changes enabled by the EC financial regulation and also expect ECHO to maintain a spirit of partnership in its humanitarian support through a diverse portfolio of NGO partners. The drive to implement the Grand Bargain, and a results-based approach will require careful monitoring.

### ★ WHERE DOES THE GRAND BARGAIN FIT WITH EU HUMANITARIAN AID?

The high-level panel which proposed the Grand Bargain, also called for more resources in the humanitarian system and for a focus on reducing need. After the World Humanitarian Summit, the Grand Bargain should not be the panacea for all shortcomings of the system. However, it is widely perceived as an opportunity for all humanitarian actors to jointly address some long identified weaknesses through particular work streams. In their keenness to make progress on the Grand Bargain, some individual donors are already pushing through changes

in specific areas. However, by not waiting for the relevant work streams to finish their recommendations, it rather causes confusion and contradiction between the different work streams. It's important that a timeline for implementation, highlighting the necessary sequencing and interlinkages between the different commitments, is jointly developed.

The NGO community has high hopes regarding the harmonised and simplified reporting work stream's potential to contribute to a reduction of the overall administrative burden for implementers. Simultaneously however, other work stream commitments are pushing for many more financial reporting requirements than at present, such as the IATI data standard, the updated FTS platform, etc. The Grand Bargain fits with the EU's need in the current resource and political context for more efficiency and there is a trend towards larger scale contracts and consortia. NGOs want to keep quality and effectiveness on the agenda in that process. In addition, there is a concern that the simplification, multi-year funding or localisation work streams may not be implementable at EU level without the right provisions in the EC financial regulation and MFF. While the initiatives might bring some efficiency gains in terms of management, they may also undermine implementation of other Grand Bargain commitments, such as those related to localisation of aid. NGOs are working closely with donors to achieve improvements, such as through the VOICE Grand Bargain task force.

### ★ NEXT STEPS?

For 25 years VOICE has consistently engaged constructively with the EU on questions around effective and principled humanitarian assistance – promoting the crucial role of NGOs in humanitarian operations for crisis affected populations. Fortunately, many of our concerns have been heard and integrated. This year and next will be no different. Amongst other things, VOICE will be looking for simplified and harmonised donor conditions wherever relevant and a specific and bigger humanitarian budget where possible.

**The VOICE Secretariat**

## SWITCHING FROM DEVELOPMENT WORK TO HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE: LESSONS LEARNT

A national actor's experience from responding to the 2015 earthquakes in Nepal

### VIEWS FROM THE FIELD

PMU is a Swedish NGO, operating in 35 countries in collaboration mainly with local partners. In about 15 countries annually, PMU supports humanitarian programmes implemented by national and local actors. In line with focus on local actors at the World Humanitarian Summit, including commitments to further support them, PMU recognizes the role of local and national actors as first line responders. They are the ones that are there when a disaster strikes, and the ones that will remain there during and after the crises, provided adequate resources are available.

The voices from local/national organizations and their experience of implementing relief programmes rarely reach global media. So which are the lessons that can be drawn from a national NGO (NNGO) perspective, rendering humanitarian aid when an onset disaster strikes? And how does an NNGO experience the response from an insider's perspective, switching from development work to humanitarian response?

support (e.g. transport), cash and assurance of funding to local partner organisations; ensuring they were able to carry out their relief tasks unhindered. Support of local actors is an effective first response, but requires extending trust. UMN targeted its response to areas that it had been working in for a number of years and therefore had excellent knowledge of the areas and close relationships with the communities and local partner organisations. This was invaluable in enabling communication and an effective response. In-coming relief agencies often have little understanding of the context and challenges and were often unrealistic in their plans, particularly in terms of reaching more remote areas of the country. National organisations based in the country were often better placed to deliver relief than incoming agencies, while incoming international agencies were better placed to procure and import goods from outside the country. The significance of local partners being involved in relief for their own communities was highlighted in a quote from a community member who said *"our own people have brought us relief"*.

#### FACT BOX: THE 2015 NEPAL EARTHQUAKES

On 25<sup>th</sup> April 2015 at 11:56 local time, a powerful earthquake struck central Nepal. The earthquake measured 7.8 magnitude and had its epicentre at Barpak, Gorkha District, 76 km northwest of the capital Kathmandu. A second major quake of 6.8 magnitude struck on 12<sup>th</sup> May and multiple aftershocks of magnitude 4.0 or greater continued over the next few months. Thirty-one of the country's 75 districts were affected, out of which 14 were declared 'crisis-hit' for the purpose of prioritizing rescue and relief operations. Another 17 neighbouring districts were partially affected. Over 9,000 people were estimated to have been killed and 500,717 homes were completely destroyed and 269,190 sustained serious damage. 32,145 classrooms were either destroyed or heavily damaged leaving 1 million children without a classroom to return to when schools reopened on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2015.

#### ★ HOW DO WE VALUE PARTNERSHIPS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL?

When the earthquake happened in Nepal, local organisations were the first ones to respond, often within hours of when the disaster took place. PMU gave support to its long-term partner United Mission to Nepal – UMN, a national NGO with operations in several districts in Nepal. UMN in their turn provided

Good local relationships also ensured that relief distributions went more smoothly.

#### ★ NETWORKS & COORDINATION – HOW INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES AND NETWORKS CAN BETTER SUPPORT ACTORS ALREADY IN-COUNTRY

UMN benefitted from its wide network of supporting and donor organisations, ensuring

## VIEWS FROM THE FIELD

*‘National organisations based in the country were often better placed to deliver relief than incoming agencies, while incoming international agencies were better placed to procure and import goods from outside the country.’*

that resources were not a limiting factor. The pressure on UMN from multiple donors that wanted to engage and support UMN in the crisis was significant, but was eased somewhat by networks that nominated one member as the contact point. However in the first three weeks or so after the earthquake the point of contact changed about three or four times. Having one point of contact for ‘networks’ is highly recommended but donors should ensure that contact people do not change frequently and do not have responsibility for setting up their own operations in the country.

### ★ AS A NATIONAL ACTOR – BELIEVE IN YOUR OWN ORGANIZATION

Maybe most touching is the statement made by UMN. *“As an organisation not experienced in disaster relief, UMN at first lacked confidence and waited for its more experienced international partners to carry out essential tasks e.g. needs assessment. However, UMN’s long-term development experience and expertise meant that we were perfectly capable of carrying these tasks out and in fact often did this to a higher standard than external visiting ‘experts’ who often had experience of just one or two other disasters and no understanding of the context or language. Do not underestimate the relevance of your development experience in a disaster situation, or overestimate the experience and skills of outside ‘experts’. You are more capable and qualified than you realize, things just need to be done a lot faster than usual!”*

The lessons learnt for national/local NGOs to consider, or international actors supporting local partners switching to emergency response, can be concluded in the following points:

### SYSTEMS & POLICIES

- Ensure essential systems e.g. cash flow, are robust and can continue to operate and be scaled up in a disaster situation. Alternative policies should be in place that come into operation in a disaster situation, e.g. procurement policies.
- Alternative HR policies should also be put in place that come into play during a disaster situation. This should include policies for the provision of support to staff; speeded

up recruitment and transfer policies; staff communication etc. Broad policies which guide but give flexibility to management in their response are more likely to be helpful in this situation.

### HUMAN RESOURCES

- Recognize that staff are also impacted by the disaster and allow resources to be used to support affected staff as part of the initial response. Build this into the budget and plan for the first phase response. Staff are able to respond more effectively if they feel their own needs are also being addressed. Ignoring the needs of your own staff, and only serving communities, can build up resentment and tension. *Recognize the impacts of the disaster on your own staff and be creative and flexible in supporting staff affected by the disaster.*
- Involving staff in the response is one of the best ways of helping them to recover from the trauma of the event, unless they are severely traumatized and unable to work or have members in their family who need to be cared for.
- Ensure that from the beginning staff are taking regular time off and do not get burnt out. Ensure there is sufficient coverage of roles for people to take time off.
- Recognize that different leadership and management styles are required in emergency situations. Ensure staff understands this and that senior staff are equipped to make this change when required. If a person is not able to make this shift, they may need to be replaced by someone else who can for the duration of the emergency period. Build high levels of trust in the organisation as this will be vital in a disaster situation. Leaders must encourage their staff and absorb the stress that those at the field level are experiencing. Frequent contact and communication is vital in trust building.
- Push decision making authority down to the field level where possible, as significant flexibility is needed to adapt to changing demands and conditions. This is particularly important when deciding on locations to serve and for coordination with other agencies.

## THE ISSUE – MOVING FORWARD WITH THE AGENDA FOR HUMANITY

- Have contingency plans in place that define roles and responsibilities but adapt these to the needs of the situation.

**PROCUREMENT & LOGISTICS**

- In a disaster situation procurement is very challenging as goods are scarce and prices increase dramatically. Setting up links with suppliers (particularly local) prior to a disaster situation facilitates procurement and speeds up the response.
- Incoming international agencies are usually better placed to procure and import goods from abroad and can therefore be a great resource to ensure procurement from abroad is managed swiftly.
- Good communication is vital and poor technology adds significantly to the stress of your team members. Don't be afraid to invest in communications and other technology resources up-front to facilitate your response.
- UMN worked hard to link in and connect with the UN cluster system. This was essential in keeping up to date with the situation and response effort. UMN made significant use of the logistics cluster specifically for helicopter access to remote areas. Building close relationships with those responsible for these cluster operations can be very helpful in accessing support.

*Jessica Hedman*  
**Humanitarian Aid Coordinator**  
**PMU**  
[www.pmu.se](http://www.pmu.se)


*The text is based on Lessons Learnt, as presented by UMN (United Mission to Nepal) after the 2015 earthquake*

## OXFAM'S RESPONSE AND ADVOCACY WORK IN CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC:

### The Challenges of Dealing with a Forgotten and Protracted Crisis

#### VIEWES FROM THE FIELD

*'CAR [is] a clear example of a protracted crisis where frequent outbreaks of violence are adding new emergencies to an ocean of staggering humanitarian needs.'*

 I arrived in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic (CAR) in May 2015, two years after the beginning of the conflict that has been devastating the country since December 2013. My objective was to find ways to enhance the visibility of the humanitarian crisis and to successfully raise the profile of a protection crisis that remains forgotten despite half of the population being affected (more than 2 million people), almost 6,000 people killed and a million internally displaced.

In 2015 alone, almost 60,000 women reported having experienced sexual and gender-based violence. The ongoing fighting between armed groups had left half of the population hungry and harmed economic activity. At first, the crisis was perceived as being fueled by religious considerations because of the opposition between the Christian-majority "Anti-Balaka" militia and the Muslim-majority rebel group "Ex-Seleka". Today, the religious alibi has been replaced by ethnic divisions where these two armed groups are now part of a big coalition clashing with the Fulani composed armed group called "UPC".

To better understand the reality of the crisis, it is important to realize that both ethnic and religious aspects are pretexts covering complex political and economic root causes. A long-standing conflict, weak governance and a poor Human Development Index performance makes CAR a clear example of a protracted crisis where frequent outbreaks of violence are adding new emergencies to an ocean of staggering humanitarian needs.

Due to new clashes that erupted all over the country since November 2016, 100,000 people have been newly displaced, among which women's groups in Bria in eastern CAR that Oxfam helped train and equip to restart livelihoods activities. This renewed violence brought all the efforts back to square one. For example, the majority of the water collection points that Oxfam rehabilitated in Bangui in September 2015 were destroyed once again.

Oxfam believes the response to this kind of crisis should follow a long-term approach bringing together emergency, recovery and development components. Current needs are adding to pre-existing needs and cannot be addressed with a short term perspective. In 2013, the response to the displacement crisis affecting one million people took place in a context where 200,000

people in need of humanitarian assistance were already displaced due to previous violence in the north of the country. This has pushed Oxfam to adopt a community-based approach to be able to respond to new and preexisting needs, working within IDP camps and supporting hosting communities.

In 2014 the United Nations declared an L3 level of response, stating that a country is facing a large-scale humanitarian crisis, which was then deactivated in 2015. Since then, two years have passed with high levels of violence, still half a million people internally displaced and tremendous humanitarian needs. The funding has severely dropped (only 37% of the funds needed for the Humanitarian Response Plan last year were secured). The emergency interventions which respond to a repeated ad-hoc approach have not adequately responded to the long-term crisis that the country is experiencing. Protracted crises would require a more comprehensive engagement from donors to ensure that while addressing acute relief needs during peaks of violence, humanitarian organizations would be supported to implement long-term programs aimed at tackling the underlying root causes and in doing so, prepare the ground for inclusive, peaceful and just societies.

Donors and NGOs should move beyond tepid measures and propose durable solutions. The World Humanitarian Summit recognized last year that the humanitarian system should be turned on its head and promote local leadership. Oxfam is convinced that National NGOs and other local actors such as community based organizations in CAR are well placed to address these challenges. Crises tend to start in remote areas where local capacities are absent and where international actors face access challenges. When it comes to a protection crisis, local actors are better placed to ensure ownership and propose solutions at community level. I am confident that the decision of Oxfam to support local leadership with context driven approaches to deliver humanitarian aid is a good start to better respond to the protracted crisis affecting CAR.

**Isidore Ngueuleu,**  
Oxfam CAR Advocacy Manager.  
Oxfam in CAR with support from Oxfam  
Intermón  
[www.oxfamintermon.org](http://www.oxfamintermon.org)

## A VIEW ON THE EU:

Interview with Sonya Reines-Djivanides,  
Director of the EPLO network of peacebuilding organisations.

### A VIEW ON THE EU



One of the main messages from humanitarian NGOs that fed into the Agenda for Humanity at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 was for further efforts to be made globally to prevent and resolve violent conflict. In this interview we hear from the director of EPLO, a network of peacebuilding organisations about current EU priorities in this regard. VOICE meets regularly with a number of NGO networks based in Brussels, including EPLO, to exchange on issues of mutual interest regarding the EU and its external relations. [www.eplo.org](http://www.eplo.org)

#### Can you tell us a little about EPLO ?

EPLO is the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office. We're an independent platform of European NGOs, NGO networks and think tanks that are committed to peacebuilding and preventing violent conflict. It was founded in 2001 by about 16 member organisations and now has 35 members. We're based in Brussels and EPLO's mission is to influence European policy makers to take a more active and effective approach in securing peace and non-violent forms of conflict resolution in all regions of the world.

#### Last year the EU adopted the Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy. Have you seen it having an impact? What do you think of it?

It's too soon to tell its impact. We are very much focused on the implementation. It confirms that tackling the root causes of conflict and promoting peace are priorities for the EU's external action. Let's use this as an opportunity – what is the opportunity? For the EU to close the implementation gap in its support to conflict prevention. We very much see a gap in practice.

#### You have had a role in organising CSO (civil society organisation) events in advance of EU conferences recently, such as for Central African Republic (CAR) and Syria. This gives you good exposure to CSOs role and interaction with the EU. What do you think is the influence and position CSOs have in the EU at the moment?

While there is an open door for communication with the EU, it should not be taken for granted. We need to continue to push for the role of CSOs and we need to be nuanced about what their role is. But it also depends on the topic and with whom. Given the places where many of

your members and ours work, and their experiences, they deserve a seat at the table. They have really valid expertise and often it's the kind of expertise that doesn't exist internally amongst EU decision-makers. So it's not just in a watchdog capacity but also in an expertise capacity where CSOs need to be more involved.

We also have to be willing to adapt our messages. We have to make sure that the information we present and that the way we are engaging, can be absorbed. We have to be flexible in how we approach people. We have to be aware of the timing and put ourselves in the shoes of our interlocutors. It's important on a practical level. On principle it can look different, but in practice if we don't do that, our interventions will be less effective.

#### The EU has been preparing a new policy on resilience. This will include conflict prevention elements. What do you think its potential is?

This Joint Communication has an allure to it because of the convening factor. Resilience means something to the humanitarian community, the development community, peacebuilding community and it also means something to many others. But because it means something to almost everybody it can be watered down to 'what are we really talking about'? It's also interesting because it tries to tackle more overtly how to improve the EU's own resilience to external pressures: the 'internal-external' nexus.

Finding transformative approaches to building resilience against violent conflict is positive and we need to look at local capacities: what's already there and not just things that are imposed from the outside. We need to understand why in some of these situations of conflict is there not more conflict when all of the



## A VIEW ON THE EU

drivers are there? What is it that makes societies, communities and people resilient? That's interesting.

The bottom line though is how will this translate at a working level into somebody's daily job duties? Will it go from being a Joint Communication to changes in people's work streams? Unless it does it will be more of a visibility and discourse tool than making a change to the way the EU works on these issues.

**There has recently been more work done by the EU to make progress on bridging the gap between development and humanitarian action, and our engagement on resilience fits into this. Often humanitarian NGOs and peacebuilding organisations are also working in similar places. How are these silos seen on the peacebuilding side?**

It depends where you talk about this. A lot of our colleagues actually working in areas of conflict talk to each other much more than we do sitting here in Brussels for example. It's important for a peacebuilder to try and understand the perspective, obligations and the

work of humanitarian and development organisations. But *silo-isation* is the death of all of us! We have to be able to understand each other's red lines, clear particularities and the concerns within our different communities, but then we are all also working towards many of the same aims, albeit at different levels and in the short, medium and long-term.

The issue of 'do no harm' and conflict sensitivity and how we engage in conflict settings to not make conflict situations worse, is a very positive convening factor for peacebuilders, humanitarians and development actors. When you see crises such as Syria, where you have humanitarian organisations that are working year after year, now into their 7<sup>th</sup> year: they have been working in a highly charged conflict setting. It is worth us trying to understand, from the different perspectives, how we see the concept of 'do no harm' in theory but also in practice. The CSO dialogue meetings that we put together on CAR and particularly Syria, are good examples of getting humanitarian, development, human rights and peacebuilding organisations to sit together and we should do it more often. We owe it to the ultimate beneficiaries to get our act together on this.

#### VOICE ENGAGEMENT IN RESILIENCE: ENSURING THE EU APPROACH REMAINS PEOPLE-CENTRED

The EU is developing a new policy on Resilience in 2017. In January VOICE helped facilitate a European Commission consultation with civil society organisations, and to ensure VOICE members were included and their vast experience in supporting communities' capacity to respond to crises was heard. VOICE gave written input to the consultation in February and VOICE's expertise on resilience is recognised as Director Ms. Schick was invited to speak on the issue in the European Parliament Development Committee and the Centre for European Policy Studies in March.

#### Main recommendations from the VOICE paper:

The new Communication on Resilience should reiterate in particular that:

- the EU's humanitarian aid will not be used as a crisis management tool and state that a resilience objective may not override the humanitarian imperative and the need to respect humanitarian principles.
- the needs-basis of humanitarian assistance and corresponding funding allocations will be respected, rather than re-oriented towards the areas of immediate concern for the EU's own interests, such as security or tackling migration.
- the EU will maintain its current commitment to resilience, through ensuring full implementation of its Action Plan 2013-2020.
- the Resilience agenda of the EU will be mainly driven by development actors given its intrinsic links with the Agenda 2030 and the need for longer-term programming. To support this, the EU will promote a people centred, context-based and flexible approach to resilience.





## HUMANITARIAN ISSUES AT EU LEVEL

## VOICE AT WORK

### ✳ How will the EU keep funding NGOs? VOICE network organises around three key themes for quality and effective humanitarian assistance

The **Grand Bargain** (GB) which comes out of the High Level Panel for Humanitarian Financing, is seen by many as the most concrete outcome of the WHS! Since its adoption it has been signed by more than 60 humanitarian actors including NGOs. Meanwhile, the EC has proposed significant improvements to its financial regulation, which are being negotiated by the European Parliament and member states. Given the potential impact the GB may have on the humanitarian architecture and the role the EC financial regulation plays to implement it at EU level, VOICE has engaged members in broader advocacy and in a GB task force which focuses on the themes of localisation, simplification of funding conditions and multi-year planning and funding. They meet to shape VOICE positioning with the aim to influence the European Commission and EU member states in their implementation of the Grand Bargain.

VOICE has also given input to a **draft report in the European Parliament** which has been **questioning funding for NGOs from the EU budget**. Several recommendations were made by VOICE and other NGOs; among them:

- NGOs and their public funding are an essential part of a pluralist society
- NGO funding helps to correct imbalance in stakeholder engagement
- Each NGO grantee must comply with procedures, controls, reporting and audits applied in the framework of the Financial Regulation
- Simplification of procedures in new Financial Regulation would ensure more transparency for all stakeholders
- Exchange and alliances among NGOs are an added value for the EU

### ✳ Donor counter-terrorism measures' impact on humanitarian NGOs

VOICE is contributing to raising awareness of counter-terrorism measures' impact on humanitarian action, and on the mitigation measures that humanitarian NGOs already take in the context of counter-terrorism. The humanitarian sector has long noted that counter-terrorism measures have had an impact on the funding, planning and delivery of humanitarian assistance and protection activities to people in need. Recently member states tasked the European Commission to do a supra national risk assessment on money laundering and terrorist financing. VOICE organised a debate on this and contributed in writing to the European Commission's consultations for this risk assessment, underlining that humanitarian principles require that assistance and protection be provided where it is needed most and are important to get access to affected populations, especially in conflict. Humanitarians are by nature exposed to the consequences of counter terrorism measures because they work in complex conflicts and crises, and can experience tension between the humanitarian principles and donor requirements. As a consequence, they have a high awareness about potential risks and have solid experience of risk mitigation.

### ✳ Members' publications

- **Johanniter** published "Putting People First" - Community engagement in humanitarian practice. In the spirit of the World Humanitarian Summit recommendation to 'put people first', the Johanniter organised community engagement trainings. They found that the "People First Impact Method" (P-FIM) is a cost effective and efficient way to ensure that humanitarian response is timely, relevant and appropriate, where communities play their rightful role and the dignity of people affected by crisis is respected.
- **Oxfam** developed a training manual on **Gender leadership in humanitarian action**. The purpose of this training manual is to support the institutionalization of gender equality and women's rights in all humanitarian action. It was developed to support the implementation of a DG ECHO supported project on Bridging Policy and Practice in the Humanitarian System.
- **ActionAid** launched a new report **Hotter Planet. Humanitarian Crisis**, which found that over 400 million people have been affected by 2016's El Nino weather event, as a result of record droughts in a year that has also seen record levels of CO2 and the planet's hottest ever year.



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### VOICE out loud

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### VOICE asbl (Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies)

71, Rue Royale, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32 (0)2 - 541.13.60

E-mail: [voice@ngovoice.org](mailto:voice@ngovoice.org)

Website: [www.ngovoice.org](http://www.ngovoice.org)