

INFORMATION SHEET

Quality in EU Humanitarian Aid: the contribution of the VOICE network

Quality and the humanitarian sector

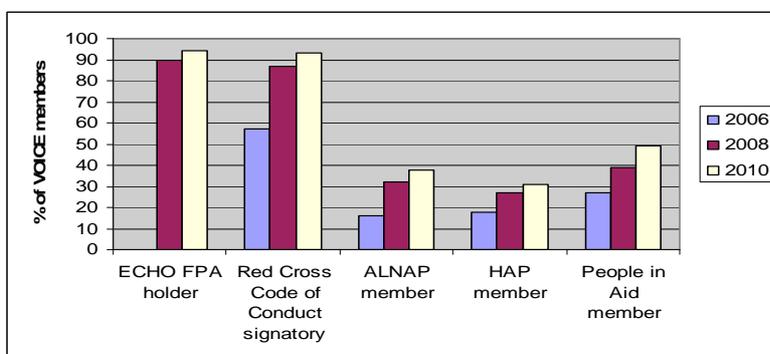
The EU is recognised as a global leader in humanitarian aid. In 2009 the European Commission provided needs-based humanitarian assistance worth €930 million to about 115 million people via NGOs, UN agencies and International Organisations. ECHO¹ delivers a very large part of its humanitarian aid via NGO partners, many of whom are members of VOICE. NGOs have proved their value as deliverers of aid in both high profile disasters and forgotten crises, mobilising rapidly and providing specialised interventions in a flexible manner. In addition, NGOs demonstrate good understanding of local context and are well-linked to communities and local organisations. A natural concern for effectiveness of needs-based humanitarian aid arising from this close contact with affected populations has been one of the drivers of the humanitarian community's longstanding engagement with quality and accountability initiatives, starting from a major evaluation of the Rwandan humanitarian crisis in 1994. Such initiatives have been given further impetus through the attention brought about by mega-crises such as the 2004 tsunami, the 2010 Haiti earthquake and the Pakistan floods.

Over recent years the humanitarian NGO sector has become professionalized and developed numerous relevant voluntary performance measures. Today humanitarian NGOs have a selection of standards and tools to use in support of principled and effective aid, and which reinforce the added value of NGOs as humanitarian actors.

These include but are not limited to:

- Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief
- The Sphere Project, Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response
- the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) which includes external verification
- the People in Aid Code of Good Practice in the management and support of aid personnel
- Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), which supports learning exchange and accountability
- Synergie Qualité guide which helps NGOs to implement their own 'quality approach'
- Quality COMPAS including a quality framework COMPAS Rose
- Standards for particular sectors (education, livestock, etc.)

Quality as a priority for the VOICE network



VOICE members have been at the forefront of developing, supporting and integrating quality initiatives into their humanitarian work. The majority of VOICE members hold an FPA² with the European Commission, indicating a recognised capacity for carrying out effective needs-based humanitarian aid operations. The chart demonstrates the increasing adherence to some of the key standards and quality initiatives by VOICE members over recent years³.

¹ DG ECHO – the European Commission's Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection

² FPA - the Framework Partnership Agreement defines contractual relations between DG ECHO and its implementing partners

³ The selection represents some of the most recognised standards and initiatives but does not imply specific endorsement by the VOICE network

VOICE as a network aims to support members' access to tools, information and resources related to developing quality assurance systems relevant to their humanitarian work. VOICE members' concern with the quality of humanitarian aid underpins the network's objective of independent humanitarian action.

Humanitarian NGO networks including VOICE, were, together with the Red Cross movement, initiators of the Global Humanitarian Platform (GHP) which brings together UN and non-UN humanitarian organisations on an equal footing. Under the GHP's "Principles of Partnership statement"⁴, all pillars of the humanitarian system commit to principles of equality, transparency, result-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity in their partnership. VOICE and its members continue to raise awareness of the Principles of Partnership, including successfully promoting their inclusion in the Action Plan to the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.

In 2010, VOICE's comprehensive input to the mid term review of the Action Plan to the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid again emphasised the continued need for promotion of humanitarian principles and respect for International Humanitarian Law.

VOICE members strive:

- To save lives and prevent suffering
- To respond in a swift and timely manner to humanitarian crises
- To base their interventions on international humanitarian law and principles, such as impartiality and independence
- To follow relevant codes of conduct and best practices
- To have high quality standards of professionalism and expertise
- To have a participatory approach with their local partners in the regions of intervention
- To view emergency interventions in the light of future sustainable recovery and development

Since 2008 the VOICE secretariat has organised trainings for 180 participants from more than 70 organisations on quality-related topics including the Sphere Standards, and Accountability in Humanitarian Aid. VOICE has collaborated with initiatives such as Transparency International's *Handbook on Preventing Corruption in Humanitarian Operations (2010)* and brings the experience of the network members into dialogue with Quality and Accountability Initiatives. VOICE facilitates the involvement of its NGO members in consultations and evaluations with DG ECHO, and regularly includes information on quality initiatives in its internal and external publications.

The way forward for quality in Humanitarian Aid

The humanitarian community has firmly adopted the quality and accountability agenda in an effort to respond more effectively and transparently to crisis-affected populations, and relevant tools and standards continue to be refined. Codes, standards and tools are, however, not enough to ensure ongoing improvement in the quality of humanitarian response – it is important also to improve the performance of the humanitarian system as a whole⁵.

Care should be taken to maintain the understanding of quality in humanitarian aid as something broader than efficiency and cost-effectiveness. While value for money is of all-round concern, NGOs must continue to promote the principled nature of quality in humanitarian aid, prioritising improved accountability to crisis-affected populations as their contribution to better humanitarian aid as well as accountability to donors.

Many aid-related quality tools and standards are initiatives from the humanitarian sector. In order to ensure effective transition through relief and rehabilitation to development (LRRD), it is important to dialogue with development actors to create continuity of quality assurance. Coherence in humanitarian-development approaches to quality should deliver best possible assistance to affected populations. Similarly disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction measures are essential to the sustainability of the results of humanitarian aid interventions.

⁴ See Principles of Partnership www.globalhumanitarianplatform.org

⁵ See also VOICE position paper on the UN-led Humanitarian Reform Process