

Humanitarian

N°24 Aid on the move DECEMBER 2022



© Groupe URD

**RESTORING MEANING
THROUGH QUALITY**



table of contents

4 **interview**

with Patrick Iribarne,

Consultant, co-founder of STRATEIS

10 **Systems change, inside and out**

Elise Shea and Meg Sattler

22 **Humanity & Inclusion: increasing quality through more inclusive and accessible accountability mechanisms**

Laura Mosberg

28 **point of view** **The paths to aid quality**

Karine Meaux

32 **How environmental protection is making aid quality and standards evolve: the case of RUTF and Nutriset**

Claire Fehrenbach

40 **interview**

with Pierre Hauselmann,

*Environnemental expert
(Pi Ethics and Compliance)*

44 **A Cameroonian organisation's role in the RESILAC project**

Samira Habiba Abdoulaye

48 **Increasing the confidence and leadership of national organisations by applying the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS)**

Bonaventure Gbétoho Sokpoh

54 **point of view** **A lexicon for a new culture of solidarity**

Charlotte Dufour

58 **Quality & partnerships: the challenges facing Action contre la Faim in Ukraine?**

Virginie Brisson

66 **The humanitarian response in Ukraine: reconsidering 'our' principles and models**

François Grünewald

76 **bibliography**





SPECIAL ISSUE

by Marie Faou
and Charly Pierluigi

Restoring meaning through quality

While the 'conventional' aid sector¹ has never been as structured, due to the development of international standards and the professionalisation of staff and organisations, a number of changes have taken place that have raised questions about the notion of 'aid quality'². For some, this notion has acquired a negative connotation as it has come to be perceived essentially as a means of imposing compliance with donor requirements, thus reflecting a technocratic vision of international aid and the 'over-standardisation' of the sector. The notion of quality has gradually become less prominent within the sector as new issues have come to the fore, such as localisation (promoting local actors during responses) and the environment. At the same time, international aid organisations, donors and (above all) local actors and populations continue to demand aid quality. We therefore need to question what it actually means and how it can be put into practice...

The number of people who require humanitarian aid in the world has never been higher than in 2022: 274 million people according to OCHA's Global Humanitarian Overview. And yet, at the same time, humanitarian space is getting smaller, particularly due to the restrictions that many states are imposing on humanitarian action, aid actors are less safe, and there are numerous violations of international humanitarian law³. The conflict in Ukraine is a perfect illustration of this, with Russia's instrumentalization of humanitarian corridors⁴. What is more, humanitarian space has been restricted since 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic: border closures, quarantines and other measures imposed by the majority of countries to prevent the spread of the virus suddenly restricted the activities of aid operators. At the same time, this context highlighted the many mutual aid initiatives that were developed locally⁵, raising questions about the way that international actors

1 - Which includes donors, multilateral agencies and international NGOs, also referred to as 'traditional' aid actors. This is in contrast to locally rooted actors, both formal and informal, who are rarely integrated into international aid mechanisms. For more information, see: V. Léon, "Local and conventional aid actors: taking inspiration from new ways of working together", Groupe URD, March 2022 (https://www.urd.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/rapport-localisation_GroupeURD_VL_20222.pdf).

2 - According to the Core Humanitarian Standard definition, quality is defined as: "the totality of features and characteristics of humanitarian assistance that support its ability to, in time, satisfy stated or implied needs and expectations, and respect the dignity of the people it aims to assist".

3 - CICR, « Respect du droit international humanitaire », 29 October 2010 (<https://www.icrc.org/fr/document/respect-droit-international-humanitaire>).

4 - Philippe Ricard and Madjid Zerrouky, « Guerre en Ukraine : les "couloirs humanitaires" une arme de guerre pour Vladimir Poutine », Le Monde, 8 March 2022 (https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2022/03/08/ukraine-les-couloirs-humanitaires-une-arme-de-guerre-pour-vladimir-poutine_6116537_3210.html).

5 - Groupe URD, "Local solutions to a global pandemic: the way of the future?" (Briefing note n°11), July 2020, (https://www.urd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Note11_COVID-19_Local-solutions_EN.pdf).



operate, and how they might support these local initiatives. In addition to the many calls for aid 'localisation', there is also a growing tendency to take environmental issues into account, which is pushing operators and donors to rethink their methods. And donor requirements continue to increase, with the demand to screen partners, and sometimes final beneficiaries, to combat money laundering and the financing of terrorism.

Though some of these changes have already been discussed at previous editions of the Autumn School on Humanitarian Aid⁶ and in the review, 'Humanitarian Aid on the Move', the 2022 Autumn School focused on their possible repercussions for aid quality. We therefore decided that each round table should provide an opportunity to discuss the relationship between aid quality and certain recent changes in the sector – quality & local actors, quality & the environment, quality &



© Groupe URD

6 - The 2021 edition of the Autumn School focused on local solidarity, the 2020 edition on solidarity during a systemic crisis, and 2019 on the climate crisis and the aid sector.



affected people – or to discuss the notion of aid quality in a new context such as the war in Ukraine. This edition of Humanitarian Aid on the Move is organised in the same way and aims to go further in exploring these overlapping topics.

1994 marked the beginning of the international aid sector's reflections on quality with the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda. Groupe URD embraced this notion and placed it at the centre of its activities from the beginning, taking part in the different initiatives that emerged during the following decades with the aim of increasing quality and accountability. In 2005, we produced the first version of the Quality and Accountability COMPASS, a method for managing the quality and accountability of international aid projects. We also produced the Participation Handbook for Humanitarian Field Workers (2009), and we co-authored the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) in 2014.

With Groupe URD reaching 30 years of age in 2023, representing 30 years of reflection about the sector and aid quality, our view today is that the system needs to be reformed and that we need to rethink the basic foundations of our activities. There are two main questions to be taken into account: how do we give back meaning to quality and how do we reconnect this notion with the recent

changes in the sector? These are the questions that the different contributors attempt to answer in this edition's articles and interviews.

*Marie Faou and Charly Pierluigi,
Quality advisors, Groupe URD*



interview

with Patrick Iribarne

Patrick Iribarne is a consultant and is the founding director of the non-financial performance consulting firm STRATEIS.

He is the author of several books on organisational performance

assessment and strategic management. He advises public and private organisations in relation to continuous improvement and non-financial performance.



What experience do you have of working on quality issues in the international aid sector?

Patrick Iribarne: I have been working with public and private sector organisations for over twenty years to help them implement a quality approach, including ten years at AFNOR, the French Standardisation Association, where I led some evaluations. Along the way, about ten years ago, I was fortunate enough to meet Coordination Sud and F3E, and NGO representatives who are very interested in these subjects, who had just launched a project to implement a self-evaluation approach for French NGOs. This project came to fruition with the MA-

DAC (Self-evaluation and continuous improvement model), developed by Coordination Sud and F3E, which included three phases: developing the approach, testing it 'for real' in five NGOs, then deploying it in other NGOs who were interested.

During each of these phases, I met very committed organisations and individuals who were keen to discuss their practices, carry out self evaluations and share their experiences. Concretely, I contributed to the working groups who developed the approach, to the facilitation of individual self-evaluations by NGOs and to the annual training course for the facilitators of the self-evaluation approaches within NGOs, with the aim of transferring skills.

How are quality approaches evolving in the business sector? And how are these changes reflected in the international aid sector?

P. I.: In the business sector, quality approaches have evolved a great deal in recent years, with successive phases of development that we can split into three waves.

In the 1990s, quality approaches consisted principally of establishing norms and standards that were common to all organisations. This trend was enshrined in the ISO 9001 stan-



dard, which was adopted in all sectors of activity. Those in charge of quality therefore focused on certification objectives, pushed by those giving orders (commissioning bodies, clients and supervisory authorities) who saw this as an opportunity to harmonise the internal organisation of their suppliers, and thus facilitate their ability to interact.

In the 2000s, the limits of these standardisation approaches gradually became apparent. First of all, in terms of effectiveness, then in terms of external recognition of the quality approach. It became clear that certified organisations were not necessarily effective, and quality departments used up all their energy pursuing compliance and did not take effectiveness into account sufficiently. In order to make up for this situation, sector-based standards gradually emerged in numerous sectors, such as the automotive, aeronautical, medical, defence and food industries. In each of these sectors, quality approaches then focused on deploying best practice in each field, with very detailed reference frameworks that allowed greater precision.

These sector-based best practices were called into question in the 2020s. Due to crises and disruptions of all kinds (technological, societal, environmental and regulatory), they proved to be insufficient to ensure the survival of many organisations. Agility, resilience and operational ef-

fectiveness have now become the priority, and quality approaches are gradually moving towards these objectives. These changes have led to new, cross-cutting approaches based on the need to combine quality with economic issues, human resources and societal responsibility. ***Those in charge of quality have therefore become conductors in charge of implementing cross-cutting principles of action centred on the organisation's raison d'être and ecosystem, its ob-***



Today, each quality approach is unique because it is specifically adapted to the organisation's context. It refers to best practice within its sector of activity, but it also takes into account the organisation's background, the challenges it is facing, the needs and expectations of its stakeholders and its specific objectives.

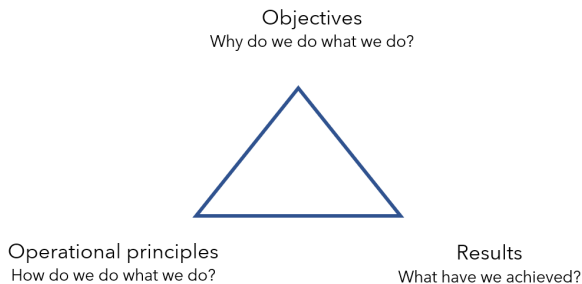




jectives, its results and its accountability. Today, each quality approach is unique because it is specifically adapted to the organisation’s context. It refers to best practice within its sector of activity, but it also takes into account the organisation’s background, the challenges it is facing, the needs and expectations of its stakeholders and its specific objectives.

It is important that the international aid sector takes inspiration from these changes in quality approaches. The old paradigm that consisted of de-

ploying organisational standards with compliance objectives is outdated, even though it did allow a lot of organisations to establish the foundations of a structured quality approach. They now need to clarify their *raison d’être*, the challenges they face, and their objectives. They need to define and deploy the most relevant operational principles and evaluate their results with respect to their main stakeholders: the beneficiaries of their activities, as well as their donors, human resources and affected local authorities.





In order to promote this new paradigm, quality approaches should be based on three components - Objectives, Principles and Results – and self-evaluation and evaluation. The aim is no longer to check whether a procedure has been applied regardless of the result, but to assess the extent to which objectives have been achieved and adjust practices accordingly, while continuing to respect operational principles. These approaches are judged based on the relevance of the practices and their effectiveness with regard to objectives, principles and results.

With the creation and implementation of the MADAC approach, we saw that this paradigm and these self-evaluation practices are particularly adapted to international aid organisations. The self-evaluations are highly participatory while also being very structured thanks to the MADAC's thirty-something criteria. They allow a multi-disciplinary group (which can range from four to several dozen people) to carry out a complete assessment of their organisation's functioning and results, then to choose a limited number of areas of improvement. These self-evaluations are an opportunity to involve, for example, members of the administrative council, field operators and partners in organisational change and improvement activities.

These participatory methods mean that the implementation of the quality ap-

proach is not limited to the specialists within the organisation – generally the quality manager – who have to inspire, implement and evaluate their own initiatives on their own. In the international aid sector, these self-evaluation and participatory activities allow actors who are often focused solely on their operations to take part in cross-sector discussions and activities.

What points does the international aid system need to be careful about regarding quality approaches?

P. I.: The organisations involved in the international aid system vary a great deal in terms of the nature of their activities, their size, their structures and their operational methods. There are nevertheless some constants that we observed in detail when we developed and deployed the MADAC method. Some of these are strengths that can help to implement quality approaches: the capacity to define the *raison d'être* and orientations of the organisation, project management skills, the motivation of individuals and teams, the willingness to take part in participatory approaches, responsibility and autonomy in implementing projects. On the other hand, other constants are weaknesses that do not help to implement quality approaches: cross-cutting governance that is often dispersed and irregular, projects and cross-cutting activities in silos, the tendency to engage in too



many projects that are not sufficiently monitored and are delegated to isolated people.

The idea here is not to point out shortcomings and to seek to correct them. Each organisation's characteristics are the result of a particular history, context and culture. Some can be a handicap and should be changed, others are not.



The idea here is not to point out shortcomings and to seek to correct them. Each organisation's characteristics are the result of a particular history, context and culture. Some can be a handicap and should be changed, others are not. As a result, the aim should rather be to develop the organisation's strengths and to make these effective levers to deploy the quality approach.



As a result, the aim should rather be to develop the organisation's strengths and to make these effective levers to deploy the quality approach.

Based on these observations, organisations need to be vigilant about the following points.

Focusing quality initiatives on key changes or improvements via prioritisation. The aim of the prioritisation is to select the subjects that the quality approach will focus on, based on two parameters: first of all, their importance (Is this subject really important for our stakeholders and is it in keeping with our *raison d'être*?); and then, their timing, to decide how opportune each subject is (Is it the right time to do this?).

Not limiting quality initiatives to risks. Too often, quality initiatives focus solely on subjects that can constitute risks: operational risks, financial risks, risks related to the organisation's image, etc. Without neglecting the importance of reducing these risks effectively, it is crucial that quality initiatives also deal with issues that contribute to success, that is to say, that help to achieve strategic objectives – increasing the localisation of projects, finding new partners and optimising fundraising, for example.

Not limiting quality initiatives to correcting problems. It is very common for quality initiatives to focus on seeking out problems: failures, frus-



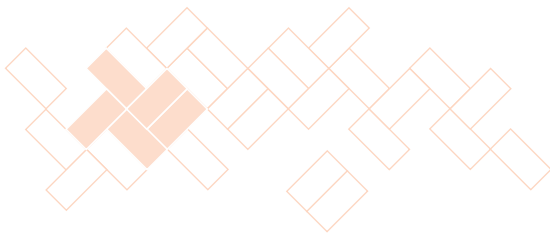
trations, complaints. As is the case for risks, this is a legitimate activity that is useful in every organisation. At the same time, sometimes quality-related activities gradually become limited to this problem-solving role ('the office of tears'), and are no longer associated with the organisation making progress by bringing about change.

Dealing with subjects based on a balanced portfolio approach. The choice of subjects to be dealt with by the quality department is therefore crucial, but so is the number and duration of activities taken on. In concrete terms, I often observe that the number of activities is very (too?) high, with widely varying durations (from several weeks to a number of years). The risk with a large number of activities is not to be able to monitor them enough nor implement them due to a lack of resources. The risk with varying durations is that they prevent an overarching view of the progress and effectiveness of the projects, with some that never finish and others that are finished in a number of days. It is therefore important that a quality approach deals with and highlights, on the one hand, a limited number of important, cross-cutting and long-term issues ('fundamentals'), and, on the other, a list of quicker and less important projects ('quick wins').

Being both consistent and agile. Quality departments need to meet two challenges: first of all they need to be

consistent so that activities that have begun should be carried out until they have met their objectives, even in the long term. Nothing is more discouraging than ambitious activities that gradually fade out without any valid reason, or activities that stop as soon as there is a problem. At the same time, staff responsible for quality need to be agile by remaining attentive to needs and developing their capacity to adjust the activities and mechanisms in place when necessary. Methods exist to meet the challenge of being both consistent and agile, and these should be appropriated by quality departments.

Cultivating internal improvement, while taking inspiration from the outside world (benchmark). I have already mentioned how important it is that quality approaches are based on each organisation's strengths, and that the days of universal good practices, that just need to be copied, are over. It is nevertheless essential that quality approaches continuously monitor the practices and results of the 'outside world', whether from similar organisations in the international aid sector, or from other sectors. Being open to the outside world means that quality departments can be a source of inspiration, can bring in new ideas and can make sure that continuous improvement activities do not 'stagnate'. ❖



Systems change, inside and out

by Elise Shea and Meg Sattler

We have always thought that affected people's opinions about aid should be the indicators of its quality. For ten years, Ground Truth Solutions (GTS) has asked people to share their perceptions of humanitarian assistance, aiming to understand how people view the quality of the aid they receive and helping them influence efforts undertaken on their behalf. We communicate this feedback to policymakers and aid providers with the goal to make affected people's perceptions a key driver of humanitarian effectiveness, aiming to champion the views of people affected by crisis wherever decisions about aid are made.

While we are proud of the progress made¹, in pushing for perceptions to be a recognised metric for humanitarian performance, we are constantly refining our methods and questioning if we are doing things 'right.' We are working to make sure crisis-affected people's views are heard, but we are not always sure that our research is based on their priorities. We also worry that our work itself, easy to list by response leaders as an 'accountability mechanism', risks being used as

a check-box for accountability, whether or not concrete change is happening as a result. Is our work perpetuating the very behaviour we seek to change?

The worrying does not stop there. When it comes to decolonising aid, what are the responsibilities of an independent accountability organisation like ours, working at multiple levels for global systemic change? Headquartered in Austria, we are aware that we could perpetuate perceptions of 'helicopter research'², studies in which researchers fly in, collect data, fly out, analyse data elsewhere and then publish results with little local involvement. What is the ideal structure, approach, and mix of methods to help us influence change in response management and at the highest levels of humanitarian policy? As an aid-adjacent organisation, the questions surrounding systematically shifting power are different from those of implementing organisations, relating to how we design research, collect and analyse data, disseminate results, and with whom we advocate for humanitarian reform.

1 - <https://groundtruthsolutions.org/2022/09/28/a-decade-in-the-trenches-of-accountability-and-so-much-still-to-accomplish/>

2 - <https://theconversation.com/helicopter-research-who-benefits-from-international-studies-in-indonesia-102165>



This type of self-reflection has always been, and will continue to be, the impetus for the innovation at the margins of our projects. We invite you to join us and take a critical look at our work to find new possibilities.

PUSHING ACCOUNTABILITY? YES. **S**HIFTING POWER? MAYBE NOT.

GTS was founded to fill a glaring gap in the way responses were monitored. That gap was people's views. We felt it would be useful to know how people were experiencing a response—to what extent they felt it was effective, participatory, inclusive, and well-managed. We knew that if this was somehow quantifiable, it could feed into the language of humanitarian monitoring: numbers. The methodology drew on customer satisfaction research, and research themes were developed around a mix of country-specific humanitarian objectives and accepted normative frameworks like the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS). These frameworks drew on substantial hefty consultations, such as the much-referenced *Time to Listen* report³.

But that is not to say the research themes are always of utmost importance to crisis-affected people. We are quick

to point out when humanitarians fail to consult affected people about aid programming before its implementation, but we rarely meaningfully include affected people in our initial research design processes. This matters because we can miss things that might unearth important information. Take Haiti, where, on a hunch, we included an extra question theme that focused on transparency. Turns out this was not only more important to those we spoke to than anything other theme, but it also led directly to relevant action points from Haiti's civil protection and coordination leaders.

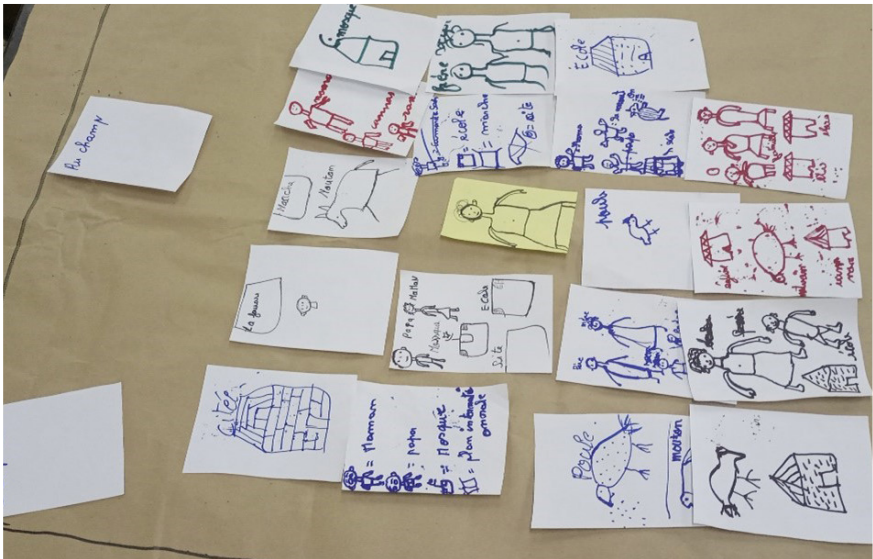
In Burkina Faso, to collect children's perceptions about humanitarian assistance, we began with an 'exploratory phase,' holding focus group discussions with children across the response to understand what they find important in their daily life and explore their thoughts about humanitarian aid. By using broad discussion guides, children's initial reactions steer the conversation, their priorities informing the design of a later phase of the project with child leaders. Our Ukraine project consulted people about their aid priorities to ensure that the quantitative and qualitative research was based on what people found most important. Further, our user journey research in the Central

3 - <https://www.cdacollaborative.org/publication/time-to-listen-hearing-people-on-the-receiving-end-of-international-aid/>



African Republic⁴, Iraq⁵, Lebanon⁶ and elsewhere consists of a series of qualitative interviews to understand people's perspectives and experiences. Inspired by human-centred design, these users' experiences guide the research, rather than predetermined research objectives. Ideally, these processes ensure that our studies push forward people's priorities, and actions taken as a result are as relevant to improving people's experiences as possible.

We have learned over time that consulting humanitarians during the inception phase is undoubtedly important to establish relationships and ensure buy-in (especially because our research rarely shines a flattering light on a response). At times, we have almost let that drive us too much and have nearly fallen into the trap of doing commissioned research for specific clusters that strays from our mission. This is tricky for us, because our organisation places primary importance on crisis-affected



Drawings from a focus group discussion in Kaya, Burkina Faso © Ground Truth Solutions

- 4 - <https://groundtruthsolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/CAR-GTS-CASH-report-ENG-1.pdf>
- 5 - <https://groundtruthsolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Falling-through-the-cracks--GTS--CCI-2021.pdf>
- 6 - https://groundtruthsolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/GTS_CAMEALEON_user_journeys_report_052021.pdf



people, not organisations. Our research has shown that no matter how close to a community aid actors can be, they rarely represent their views. Many of the humanitarians we speak to are from affected communities and can share valuable insight, but we cannot assume they represent the views of crisis-affected communities. Local humanitarians will speak from their positionality, which is likely a position of power in comparison to affected communities. When planning our questionnaire design in one country, consultants resisted the plan to test the questionnaire with affected communities because they thought the population was not smart enough to understand, emphasising their 'local knowledge' and expertise in the sector as the priority.

CLOSING THE LOOP CAN BE TOKENISTIC, TOO

Our analysis and dialogue processes strive to be cyclical: we share preliminary analysis, gathering and integrating feedback in the hopes that the final conclusions are a nuanced and accurate reflection of what affected people think while also addressing the constraints humanitarians face. We discuss our data with affected communities, to make sense of the data and gather recommendations. For example, in early 2022, we partnered with Fama Films⁷ in

Burkina Faso to facilitate a community gathering and have an open dialogue about whether the results of an earlier quantitative study accurately represented people's thoughts. Participants were quick to tell us when they thought our data was outdated and wrong or when it resonated, which helped us to correct or clarify our analysis.

In the past, we simply shared data back with communities, assuming that was 'good practice' and knowing that most researchers did not do it. But we realised that unless we had a clear purpose (like, equipping local actors with data they could use), or could report the concrete changes made based on people's feedback, simply telling them what they had told us in the first place was redundant.

Even a more involved dialogue process can be extractive. Although such processes gather rich qualitative input to bolster our analysis with the aim of it making data more actionable (and thus increasing the chances that people's views will be listened to and aid will improve), communities may gain relatively little from their participation in these sessions. This fact hit hard in a recent meeting with Fama Films where they noted that community leaders wanted to know what became of their engagement. "Nothing changed," said the community leaders. People have long told us that they do not need us to "share back

7 - <https://www.facebook.com/famafilms226/>



what we learned.” They know what they said. They want to know what was concretely done based on the feedback they gave.

After conducting quantitative and qualitative studies in Haiti, our team discussed the findings with humanitarians, and participants developed recommendations for how to act on the data. Local consultants then held community dialogue sessions with diverse community representatives to share the quantitative and qualitative data, as well as the recommendations from humanitarians. Participants in this dialogue session said that they not only felt respected but emphasized how they would use these data and recommendations in



People have long told us that they do not need us to “share back what we learned.” They know what they said. They want to know what was concretely done based on the feedback they gave.



their own community work. “The very fact of sharing this information for us means a lot because at least we see that there are some organisations that respect people. Coming to us is a sign of respect!” said a leader of a motorbike taxi association. A representative of the Haitian Red Cross added, “I will use these recommendations to get closer to the community. When we have to carry out activities, we will be more attentive to the comments of the community.” Returning to people with more than just data was critical so that they could understand how their previous engagement was discussed and contributed to the advocacy process.

EQUAL AND EMPOWERING **P**ARTNERSHIPS

We are proud of the fact that we do not have a growth model, nor do we have one method that we roll out everywhere. Rather than set up shop in all the contexts we work, spending precious time and resources registering and establishing costly sub-branches, we typically contract local research organisations or local data collection companies to support our sampling design and collect data. Project teams develop strong relationships with local research teams, looking to them to help contextualise research tools and methodologies. Data collection partners are, of course, paid according



to their determined rates and their company name is acknowledged in methodology descriptions, but their support is typically noted as the 'data collection service provider' or 'enumerator team.' We have not systematically acknowledged (or in fact always utilised) their knowledge contributions to design and implementation. Further, we have not often coauthored reports with research teams. Report writing is our forte but involving local partners in the drafting process will ensure "knowledge production" is shared, and not only allocated to GTS staff.

We broke this cycle in Bangladesh where, following Covid-19 research co-led by the Bangladesh Red Cross Society, we have partnered with the International Centre for Climate Change and Development⁸), a Bangladesh-based research institute, on a climate adaptation project. Similarly, our newest project in Afghanistan was co-designed and is co-led by Salma Consulting, a local research agency. And we are in the process of applying for a new project in Nigeria with local research partners as co-leads.



An enumerator with Facts Foundation (GTS Partner), El Miskin IDP Camp (Nigeria, September 2022) © KC Nwakalor for Ground Truth Solutions

8 - <https://www.icccad.net/>



While pursuing our goal to elevate affected people's perceptions in decision-making, we must not forget about their own agency to advocate for themselves. Assuming the role of 'advocate,' without sharing the data with community groups misses a step. We have a responsibility to ensure that our data can be used by community members, not just discussed with them. For our Haiti project, we were enthused to hear that by translating our detailed report into Creole and building relationships with civil society, local actors had a useful tool to advocate and take action.

All countries have their own accountability ecosystems, involving a range of systems, people and institutions: academia, local media, civil society organisations, activists, think tanks, and more. A hyper-focus on 'humanitarians' has often seen us miss opportunities to partner with those most likely to elevate community views or hold the humanitarian system to account. This has been a strategic priority for a while, but the rising pressure to feed the humanitarian beast and ensure enough buy-in from response leaders that they commit to listening to communities at all, has left our project teams with little time. We know that this is something we can do better.

C COOPERATING OR CO-OPTED?

After years of resistance to taking affected people's perceptions seriously as an indicator of the effectiveness of a response, 2018 saw the system turn a corner. In Chad, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) ensured that the perception data we collected was integrated into the 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) and tied to the strategic objectives for the response. Perception data embedded into the planning document for a humanitarian response was a big step forward for transparency and lauded as a massive step forward in ensuring affected people's views drive the response. Affected people's perceptions were, finally, on the map. This uptake was revolutionary. We thought the needle might move. This accomplishment prompted us to advocate for perception data to be integrated in all HRP documents, to see all responses living up to their HPC commitments. Slowly but surely, we have checked this box in almost all the contexts where we work. In many responses, we are asked by coordination teams to implement perception surveys year after year, so that the data can feed into annual HRP documents.

But consistently negative data indicated a dismal reality: nothing was really changing. Coordination teams and humanitarians could ask for our



Les indicateurs de redevabilité retenus pour 2022

INDICATEURS DE PERCEPTION	OBJECTIFS STRATÉGIQUES	ENGAGEMENT DU CHS	CIBLES 2022
Le % des personnes affectées qui se sentent informées au sujet de l'aide qu'elles peuvent recevoir	1	4	80%
Le % des personnes affectées qui sentent que les acteurs humanitaires les traitent avec respect	1	8	85%
Le % des personnes affectées qui sentent que le soutien qu'elles reçoivent les prépare à l'autonomie ;	2	3	15%
Le % des personnes affectées qui voient des améliorations dans leurs conditions de vie ;	2	2	30%
Le % des personnes affectées qui pensent que l'assistance touche ceux qui en ont le plus besoin	3	1	30%
Le % des personnes affectées qui se sentent en sécurité dans leur lieu de résidence	3	3	80%
Le % des personnes affectées qui se sentent à l'aise pour signaler des cas d'abus ou de mauvais traitements de la part du personnel humanitaire ;	3	5	80%
Le % des personnes affectées qui savent comment faire des suggestions ou soumettre des plaintes aux acteurs humanitaires	3	5	60%
Le % des personnes affectées qui pensent qu'elles recevront une réponse à leur plainte ;	3	5	60%
Le % des personnes affectées qui pensent que leurs opinions sont prises en compte dans la prise de décisions.	3	4	30%

Source: Chad Humanitarian Response Plan (2022)

data, invite us to present at meetings, and plot percentages into glossy planning documents, but no one was ever held accountable for acting on the data. Worse still, our data became expected and risked becoming co-opted. People started to expect our data to appear among many other data sets to feed the HRP, which diminished the shock value. It was about ticking a box, not highlighting community views. Meanwhile, integrating perception data in HRPs — even if the responses were damning, and even if nothing was done to improve them — enabled the coordination to create the illusion that they were listening to communities. Suddenly, we realised that we might be facilitating a facade. Rather than reforming the system, what if we were enabling it to stay the same? Our perception surveys, alongside AAP working groups and activities, served to create a mask

for country responses to wear year after year, pretending to be accountable.

Nauseated by how our research enables apathy, we started frantically searching for reasons why no one was acting on perception data. Like many in the sector who were scratching their heads, wondering why nothing was improving, we concluded that incentives were a large part of the problem. Humanitarians at global, national, and organisational levels are not incentivised to act on people's feedback. We find that HCTs are not often motivated to coordinate clusters or organisations to act on the perceptions published. Convening the ICCG is about as good as it gets. And forget about any follow up to that meeting. HCTs sometimes even throw their hands up, claiming that they have no authority to hold operating organisations to



All countries have their own accountability ecosystems, involving a range of systems, people and institutions: academia, local media, civil society organisations, activists, think tanks, and more. A hyper-focus on ‘humanitarians’ has often seen us miss opportunities to partner with those most likely to elevate community views or hold the humanitarian system to account.



account once our data is on the table. Meanwhile, organisations like to point fingers at their donors, claiming that short-term and/or inflexible funding prevents them from being able to adapt to affected people’s preferences and inhibits accountability.

To counter the risks of co-opted data and pushback, we have increasingly

bolstered our country and global advocacy to ensure our reports do not just pile up on ReliefWeb. Long gone are the days when publishing reports and sharing them with response teams was the extent and norm for our advocacy. Better advocacy is not rocket science. We find that closed door conversations allow us to hear the challenges clusters, agencies, and organisations face to being accountable and the support they need. This approach allows us to be privy to all sides of the argument: where organisations point fingers at donors, there are normally three fingers pointing back at them. Armed with data on what everyone else’s excuses are for not being accountable, we use these secluded, ‘safer’ spaces – where more people are actually listening – to push hard for uptake of results.

We are also dipping our toes into more public advocacy. We do this with caution, because our behind-the-door advocacy remains our most successful, and we also need to have a trusting relationship with decision-makers for public advocacy to work; we need to shock, not alienate. But we cannot help but notice that for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), another humanitarian priority, it was the media that propelled this theme’s objectives forward. We wonder if the same could be true with accountability and effectiveness. A few of our efforts have shown promising results. A colla-



boration with *The New Humanitarian*⁹ helped us 'go public' with Haiti data, raising awareness at a national and international level that we have struggled to do elsewhere. Similarly, advising Mark Lowcock on his final statements¹⁰ as the departing Emergency Relief Coordinator helped to reinvigorate a global conversation about real accountability at the highest level.

DISRUPTING MEANS WORKING WITHIN

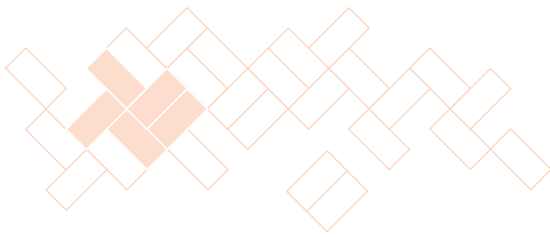
At times, we might feel limited by the system we are trying to change. Relying largely on project funding from humanitarian allocations can limit our ability to plan long term research and advocacy, just as it can limit humanitarians from moving beyond life-saving aid to durable solutions. Yet our funding partners are key strategic allies, enabling affected people's voices to be heard across the system and influence policy decisions. To disrupt the system, we need to keep working within it while remaining independent enough to provide an 'audit' function. This certainly keeps us on our toes.

While we do have reasons to question if we are doing things 'right,' knowing that humanitarian action can increasingly appear accountable while lacking incentives for real change is powerful motivation to keep pushing at all levels for community voices to be heard. We refuse to see our work perpetuate the façade of accountability and hope that by countering stagnant reform with rigorous, multifaceted advocacy, we can influence real, incremental change, until humanitarian action is determined by crisis-affected people's agency, preferences, and priorities. ✨

*Elise Shea,
Policy Coordinator &
Meg Sattler,
CEO at Ground Truth Solutions*

9 - <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2022/04/04/haiti-wide-gap-between-aid-promise-and-reality>

10 - <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/apr/21/humanitarian-failing-crisis-un-aid-relief>



Humanity & Inclusion: increasing quality through more inclusive and accessible accountability mechanisms

by Laura Mosberg

Today, it is a priority for the aid sector and all organisations like Humanity & Inclusion (HI) to ensure that affected people are at the centre of their projects.

The Grand Bargain's 'Participation Revolution' (2016)¹ promised to 'include people receiving aid in making the decisions which affect their lives'. For its part, the Core Humanitarian Standard² (CHS) states that 'communities and people affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them' (Commitment 4) and also that they should 'have access to safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints' (Commitment 5).

These international commitments and standards led to the elaboration of a

Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Policy at Humanity & Inclusion in 2015, which was reviewed in 2022 with support from Groupe URD. This policy defines the implementation framework for all of our projects and includes the fundamental principle of **accountability, or the capacity to be accountable in a transparent manner to all the stakeholders who have a direct or indirect interest in our projects**. It also includes a quality reference framework which defines criteria to ensure that our projects are of sufficiently high quality.

Among these criteria is 'accountability to affected people', which concerns accountability towards communities and populations in our operational areas. It involves key actions related to different accountability mechanisms: the sharing of information, the setting up of discussion forums, and the deployment of participatory approaches.

With the aim of reinforcing the quality of its projects, Humanity & Inclusion is therefore committed to including these accountability mechanisms in its operational programmes. To do this, the organisation uses guidelines

1 - <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/a-participation-revolution-include-people-receiving-aid-in-making-the-decisions-which-affect-their-lives>

2 - <https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/files/files/Core%20Humanitarian%20Standard%20-%20English.pdf>



which are sufficiently flexible to allow mechanisms to be adapted to different contexts and cultures. Each accountability mechanism included in the quality reference framework is explained in a guide. The first mechanism that was deployed concerned **information sharing strategies**, and defined communication methods, the frequency with which these are used and key messages per project cycle phase. **Feedback and complaints systems** were then deployed to gather, process, respond to and learn from grievances, requests for information and assistance, and complaints from the population directed at HI. Monitoring these accountability mechanisms on all our operational programmes has been a key project in the last year with support being pro-

vided when the mechanisms are being designed. Another important aspect has been evaluating the effectiveness of the mechanisms that have already been in place for a number of years. And lastly, **the deployment of participatory approaches** will be a priority for the organisation in the coming months.

Implementing an accountability mechanism consists of more than setting up a hotline or suggestion boxes to gather feedback and complaints, or putting up a poster to share information about the organisation and its work. **An accountability mechanism involves a full set of procedures, from the design phase to the exit strategy, using communication channels that suit all the population groups involved in our projects.**



© Johanna de Tessières / HI



This then raises the question of how to make these accountability mechanisms inclusive and accessible, allowing the full implication of girls, boys, women and men of all age groups (children and elderly people) – including disabled people – so that everyone can take part fully. Having collected good practices already in place in our programmes, and following discussions between several members of staff at HI (HQ and field) with different areas of technical expertise, we defined four key principles to be taken into account to ensure that people have access to and are included in the accountability mechanisms put in place by the organisation.



This then raises the question of how to make these accountability mechanisms inclusive and accessible, allowing the full implication of girls, boys, women and men of all age groups (children and elderly people) – including disabled people – so that everyone can take part fully.



KNOWLEDGE OF BARRIERS

Access and inclusion depend on detailed knowledge of the barriers that people who take part in our projects have to overcome, whether they are physical or institutional, or related to information or attitudes. Knowledge is also needed of the related risks, people's capacities, and the power dynamics in our operational areas. This knowledge needs to evolve as the project cycle unfolds, and should not be limited to the needs assessment phase. It needs to include the characteristics of the population involved via the collection of disaggregated data (by age, gender, and disability – using the Washington Group's series of questions, for example³) in all the relevant exercises.

INVOLVING AFFECTED PEOPLE

Affected people need to be involved in all decision-making processes. This can be on an individual level or via the organisations who represent the different population groups we work with: disabled people, women, young people, ethnic groups, etc. It is equally relevant to: the design phase (What communication methods should be adopted? What feedback and complaints channels should be put in place in a given context?); implementation (Is the in-

3 - <https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/question-sets/>



formation shared clear? Are the responses to the feedback and complaints received qualitative?); and the project closure/exit strategy (What is the best way to communicate about the project results and subsequent steps? Who should be approached if there are complaints in the future?).

ADJUSTMENTS

Based on the knowledge and involvement mentioned above, staff should be able to adapt their accountability mechanisms by making reasonable adjustments that increase accessibility and inclusion. According to the IASC guidelines on the inclusion of persons with disabilities, reasonable adjustments are defined as 'necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments, not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms'⁴. This can be the translation of communication materials into braille or into an easy to read and understand format, or the presence of a sign language interpreter during face-to-face exchanges. Reasonable adjustments can also be made to take into account gender and age, for example, in terms

of the ratio of women and men among the staff who deal with the feedback and complaints, or by simplifying the explanations of accountability mechanisms directed at children. Nevertheless, these reasonable adjustments can only be made if the necessary financial and human resources are available.

LEARNING

Finally, an accessible and inclusive accountability mechanism also requires continuous improvement based on frequent monitoring and evaluation activities to regularly check accessibility and inclusion. For this, we decided to mobilise our technical experts (focal points in inclusive humanitarian aid at HQ and in the field) in order to train not only HI staff, but also the staff of our implementing partners.

These partners play a key role in deploying and running accountability mechanisms. *As we initially focused a great deal on the role of HI staff and the organisation's commitments in this area, we wanted to carry out a complementary review of our internal practices regarding how our local partners are included in the design and implementation of accountability mechanisms*, the role that they want to play, their internal practices, and the

4 - <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-guidelines-on-inclusion-of-persons-with-disabilities-in-humanitarian-action-2019>



kind of support that they wish to receive from HI on this issue.

Twenty-six of our local partners (disabled persons' organisations, civil society organisations and state services) answered questions in three countries where we conduct operations (Haiti, Burkina Faso and Nepal). This study showed us ***the importance of building accountability mechanisms together***



The study also underlined that they already have their own parallel accountability mechanisms that are adapted to the local culture and context, based on oral and informal methods, and that they are very keen to reinforce mutual learning on this issue with HI. [...] we are planning not only to adapt our guides to clarify the role of local partners, but also to provide support on this issue to partners who want it.



with our local partners, and the fact that this is currently not done enough due to a lack of guidelines and clarification about the roles and responsibilities of each entity. The initial findings of the study show that we underestimate the knowledge of the specific characteristics of a context that local partners bring, and that their inclusion helps us to make mechanisms more relevant to different communities. The study also underlined that they already have their own parallel accountability mechanisms that are adapted to the local culture and context, based on oral and informal methods, and that they are very keen to reinforce mutual learning on this issue with HI. Based on the results of the study, we are planning not only to adapt our guides to clarify the role of local partners, but also to provide support on this issue to partners who want it.

Through inclusion and accessibility, we are therefore reinforcing mechanisms promoting accountability towards affected people, the final objective being to increase the quality of our operations.

Despite these recent activities, many questions remain: how do we improve the analysis of power dynamics that affect under-represented groups, in order to have relevant accountability mechanisms? How do we go from simple consultation to genuinely transformative participation (full involvement



of different population groups in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the projects and policies that concern them) ? How can the role of the organisations that represent these population groups be reinforced, based on the results of the internal study? How can an intersectional approach be applied in crisis situations and how can accountability mechanisms be adapted to these aspects? These are questions that we have discussed and will continue to discuss internally and externally in order to continuously improve our practices. ✂

Laura Mosberg

*MEAL expert,
Humanity & Inclusion (HI)*



© John Wessels/HI



point of view

The paths to aid quality

by *Karine Meaux*



Karine Meaux has been Head of Fondation de France's International Relief department since 2017. As such, she coordinates the Foundation's response to major crises, such as the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, the hurricanes in the Caribbean in 2017, the Covid-19 health crisis in 2020-21, the explosion in the Port of Beirut and the war in Ukraine. She contributes to discussions within the sector about humanitarian issues and manages a team in charge of programmes concerning agriculture, youth and human rights, principally in North and West Africa. She previously worked for Coordination SUD (2011-2017), where she occupied several different positions, and for Caritas France (2009-2011) as a Project Coordinator.

The 2022 edition of Groupe URD's Autumn School provided an opportunity to discuss aid quality, defined as "the totality of features and characteristics of humanitarian assistance that support its ability to, in time, satisfy stated or implied needs and expectations, and respect the dignity of the people it aims to assist"¹. For some years now, humanitarian actors have been looking for the best way to achieve these objectives. We have discussed our experiences in work groups, and we have taken part in international conferences on this issue. It is time to ask the question: have we improved?

Professionalisation that has been positive... but not only

Many humanitarians who began working in the sector in the 1990s and 2000s, when the major summits on aid quality and effectiveness were held, went from being social actors in the field to project managers, or even data administrators. Was this really the path to take to improve assistance to people affected by crises and hazards, and to promote greater solidarity between peoples?

Our intentions were good. It was important to establish indicators and standards in order to guarantee a minimal level of service that people in difficulty should receive in all contexts. It

1 - According to the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability, 2015.



was necessary to provide a framework for relations with 'partner' organisations in order to anticipate risks and limit conflicts. We had to be as transparent as possible in order to remove the risk of conflicts of interest or corruption via calls for proposals and more and more due diligence procedures. The main issue was to prove to donors and funding agencies that we, the aid operators, were worthy of trust, that generosity was compatible with professionalism, and that our organisations were credible.

Spontaneous outpourings of generosity therefore gave way to strategic plans to optimise resources and better serve the targeted people. Following in the footsteps of emergency relief and co-funding departments, who were often pioneers in this area, organisations began to produce more and more procedures, standards and norms. More and more software appeared (to manage funds, human resources, projects, etc.) to rationalise and interconnect our data, supposedly to help us save time, measure the impact of our projects and limit our errors.

The idea had been that, by gaining competencies and recognition, we would have more resources and freedom. But it seems that, in doing so, we have in fact built our own prison.

Quality that is meaningful

Is this trend unavoidable? It is certainly neither cast in stone, nor universal. Our operational methods should be defined by a number of major principles rather than by a handbook of procedures. This is what we have done at Fondation de France, for example.

First, there needs to be a strong desire to promote **proximity**, with a strong focus on localisation, both in France and internationally. In Lebanon, and more recently in Ukraine, more than 80% of funding has gone directly to local associations - those that are based in neighbourhoods, villages, and territories. Rather than asking for time-consuming administrative dossiers and complex logical frameworks,



The idea had been that, by gaining competencies and recognition, we would have more resources and freedom. But it seems that, in doing so, we have in fact built our own prison.





point of view

dialogue, comparing recommendations and carrying out field visits help to create relations of trust before and during projects. This does not mean that those who want to cannot put in place learning and continuous improvement mechanisms (pedagogical audits, peer support systems, collective and iterative knowledge transfer, etc.).

Another key word that partner organisations often mention is **flexibility**. We all agree that today's world is increasingly unstable and uncertain, so when there is trust and reciprocity between partners, we need to prioritise agility and intelligence rather than processes that slow action down.



And what exactly are we afraid of? If abuses and embezzlement are going to happen, won't the perpetrators be able to get round or manipulate the procedures anyway? Do we really stand to lose more by promoting trust and flexibility than we have already lost by dehumanising our work?



And what exactly are we afraid of? If abuses and embezzlement are going to happen, won't the perpetrators be able to get round or manipulate the procedures anyway? Do we really stand to lose more by promoting trust and flexibility than we have already lost by dehumanising our work?

The 'real' questions we need to ask given current developments

The fact that the scale of humanitarian needs around the world is continuing to grow means that we need to radically rethink our way of working. We will need to make sure we get the focus right in a world riddled with contradictory, and even schizophrenic demands. It is not easy to remain neutral and help the most vulnerable people when fiscal policies, and diplomatic and security demands make whole territories inaccessible. Maintaining human relations while managing our environmental footprint, and being able to measure and offset it, is a real challenge.

It is also seen as a luxury to invest in anthropological and cultural analyses, even though our actions have an effect on the dynamics between actors and socio-economic developments. What is more, targeting the most vulnerable people is more complex when crises are increasingly global: the COVID-19 health crisis and



the war in Ukraine have affected everyone around the world. The scale of crises requires assistance on a massive scale which leaves little room for specific or hard-to-reach cases, while, at the same time, our societies are increasingly fragmented.

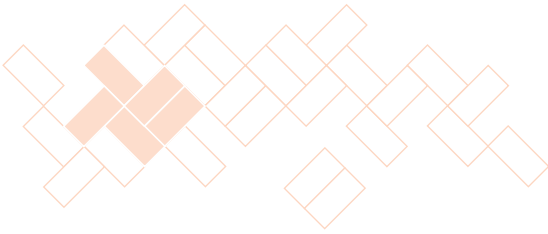
These changes have led to increased efforts to reach the highest number of beneficiaries. But, in order to do so, field staff have not been properly paid, despite their crucial role regarding the quality of projects, in terms of selecting and gaining access to those who require assistance most. When running costs are increased, it is to carry out more controls, not to improve the working conditions or wellbeing of staff who are just as professional, but have had to undergo more changes than staff in other sectors.

To help us deal with these difficult choices and find the right trade-offs, there is nevertheless a reliable starting point: **the human dimension, which is supposed to be at the heart of humanitarian action**, and which is the most precious aspect of our work. It allows us to learn about so many cultures, meet researchers, farmers and ministers, experience the complementarities and complexities of each situation, and look for solutions that bring together the maximum number of actors.

We urgently need to resist the growing temptation of standardised and secure quality, and de-intellectualise our actions. The humanitarian sector has everything to gain by embarking on a path based on dialogue and trust, fully embracing the complexity of human relations, and accepting the risk of not being able to measure and control everything. ✎

Karine Meaux

*Head of Fondation de France's
International Relief department*



How environmental protection is making aid quality and standards evolve: the case of RUTF and Nutriset

by Claire Fehrenbach

The cumulative effect of climate change, ongoing logistical difficulties related to the COVID pandemic, and the war in Ukraine has made the availability of agricultural products more uncertain, commodity prices have soared, and millions of families have become food insecure. The figures in the 2022 edition of The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (FAO, FIDA, WHO, WFP and UNICEF) are particularly alarming: the number of people affected by hunger in the world reached 828 million in 2021, an increase of about 46 million compared to 2020.

Malnutrition is one of the consequences of the failure of the food system. During emergency responses to severe malnutrition, humanitarian actors use ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTFs), such as PlumpyNut®, which can help to save children's lives when all else has failed. These products meet strict specifications that evolve in response to new research and proofs of concept to improve the treatment. These specifications refer to the product itself, but also to packaging and quality control.

They aim to guarantee that the product is as effective as possible for children, and that it respects their rights and saves their lives.

However, at a time when there is increasing focus on the issues of climate change, waste management and the 'One Health' approach, environmental parameters are not yet being sufficiently taken into account in RUTF guidelines.

THE FIRST TREATMENTS

The Nutriset Group has been fighting malnutrition for 35 years. In close colla-

boration with NGOs like MSF and research centres like IRD, the Lescanne family (from Normandy) developed products that aimed to effectively treat acute malnutrition. With the initial therapeutic milks (F-75 and F-100) developed by Nutriset, specialised centres linked to hospitals (therapeutic nutrition centres) were at last able to treat malnourished children. However, this represented a major investment for families (distance from the hospital, one or more people accompanying



the child, treatment that lasted several weeks, often the mother away from home, loss of income, etc.), and did not guarantee that the child would survive after getting out of hospital. What is more, these preparations required access to clean drinking water, which often was not available.

In 2005, during the famine in Niger, a nutritional solution that Nutriset had been studying for a number of years - PlumpyNut® - was used on a large scale outside health centres. Thanks to this formula, which no one had previously been capable of developing, or had taken the trouble to develop, the child was able to go home when their condition was stabilised. They would continue their treatment there for several days/weeks and would only have to go to hospital once a week. With these new programmes (Community-based Therapeutic Care/Community-based Management of Acute Malnutrition), the percentage of malnourished children who received treatment rose from 10-15 % to more than 50 % (the current minimum according to international standards).

D EVELOPMENT OF THE LOCAL NETWORK

The Nutriset Group is convinced of the importance that each country should have the capacity (know-how and facilities) to meet its own popula-

tion's needs. Since 2005, it has been supporting a network of independent partners, known as the PlumpyField® network, made up principally of small and medium-sized local businesses and NGOs so that production takes place as close as possible to where the needs are. Following a request from UNICEF to encourage local production, significant support was also provided so that quality products in keeping with international recommendations for RUTFs could be produced locally and would be available, even in fragile contexts (e.g. Nigeria, Sudan and Ethiopia). Thanks to technical support from the Nutriset Group, par-



The Nutriset Group is convinced of the importance that each country should have the capacity (know-how and facilities) to meet its own population's needs. Since 2005, it has been supporting a network of independent partners [...].





ticularly in terms of industrial development, quality assurance and R&D, agri-food and phytosanitary standards are respected. Thus, countries with industrial production units within their territories can move a step closer to nutritional autonomy. Today, there are Plumpyfield® network producers in the majority of countries where there is malnutrition: Haiti, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Sudan, Ethiopia, Madagascar, India, etc.

In Africa and Haiti, to limit imports as much as possible, the Nutriset Group, its partners, and sometimes certain

donors have contributed to structuring and developing local agricultural sectors in order to increase the proportion of locally sourced ingredients. This is the case, for example, for peanuts, which are usually sourced locally. As a result, the peanut sector has gradually become more solid:

- The deployment of Aflasafe®, a biological solution to protect peanuts from a mycotoxin (aflatoxin)¹ ;
- The establishment of peanut roasting factories so that they can be used in nutritional solutions in Niger, Ethiopia, Sudan, Burkina Faso and Haiti.



Beneficiary of a Nutriset Program © Groupe Nutriset

1 - Aflatoxin is a common fungal toxin in agricultural products and food. It is associated with acute and chronic toxicity in animals and humans. Aflasafe is the biological control product that significantly reduces aflatoxin in crops.



Thousands of local peanut producers are now able to cultivate and sell their produce, which is then processed (sorting, shelling and roasting), before being used to make nutritional solutions. This locally sourced produce has several advantages as it gives local producers work and limits the number of ingredients that are imported internationally.

THE REVISION OF RUTF SPECIFICATIONS

These products, which contain relatively simple ingredients (vegetable oil, peanuts, sugar, milk derivatives and micronutrients) are only available under medical supervision and are sometimes included in the list of essential medicines in the recipient countries. Yet, they are not produced by the pharmaceutical industry, but by the agri-food sector. Since 2015, the Codex Alimentarius – under the auspices of FAO and WHO – has been drawing up guidelines for ready-to-use therapeutic foods used to treat acute malnutrition among children over 6 months of age. These guidelines were officially adopted in November 2022² and are already included in the specifications that UNICEF and other bodies who buy RUTFs use, and have therefore been integrated by RUTF producers.

The guidelines and UNICEF's specifications mainly focus on the nutritional composition of the product: the list of authorised ingredients, the quality of proteins (essential amino acids), fatty acids (omega 3 and omega 6), and to a lesser extent, the adaptation of the levels of certain micronutrients. All this will help to guarantee what is best for the child's development, provide guidance for the development of innovative formulas, and help states to regulate the local production of RUTFs which is being put in place to meet soaring demand. Until now, the focus was the child's physical growth, but their cognitive development is now being taken into consideration. These new specifications will align all actors in terms of the enhanced nutritional quality of products, provide a rigorous basis for developing alternative formulas (more adapted to available ingredients, to the geographical area, to dietary habits...) and will allow governments to supervise these new local formulas.

THE IMPACTS OF THESE NEW SPECIFICATIONS

The new specifications are forcing RUTF producers to revise certain practices and approaches in order to rapidly change their formulas. Though the nu-

2 - <https://www.unicef.org/supply/stories/new-codex-guidelines-pave-way-innovation-ready-use-therapeutic-food-rutf>



nutritional values are precisely specified, producers are free to establish their own 'recipe' to achieve these. Each producer chooses the ingredients, and their proportions, in order to meet these new demands. This can involve new ingredients (soya, for example) or more suitable peanut varieties, supplied locally or internationally, or increasing the milk content in the RUTF.

The peanuts produced in Africa and Haiti by the partners involved in the PlumpyField® network do not meet the specifications regarding Omega 6 and Omega 3. This means that local producers have to find other ingredients with a different nutritional profile, but which may not be available locally. The soya varieties produced in the United States, or the peanuts produced in Argentina have a nutritional profile that is more adapted to the new specifications. But these varieties are not cultivated in Africa and Haiti. RUTF producers in these countries will therefore have to import them, which will disrupt the local sectors and increase transport-related greenhouse gas emissions.

Establishing a new agricultural sector that meets a specific need takes years. New varieties need to be identified and selected. They need to be tested to ensure that they can be developed in a specific region of the world, and to ensure that farmers adopt them, cultivate them and are able to sell them. And you need to ensure that they are integrated

into processing and commercialisation systems. As such, new sectors are difficult to develop, organise and consolidate. But they are essential so that the food system can be transformed in the future, with more local development and a reduced carbon footprint.

Though the specifications take into account the cognitive development of the child, they do not take into account the ingredients used and the localisation of producers, even though Nutriset raised this issue several times. The nutritional value of RUTFs is standardised in order to provide what is best for children's development, regardless of the geographical area where the malnourished child lives, regardless of the quality and availability of the agricultural products cultivated nearby. There are numerous production centres and though some producers can find all the ingredients locally (in the USA and in India, everything is available locally), this is not the case everywhere, and certain ingredients have to be imported. The varieties of peanuts cultivated in Africa and Haiti do not have the right essential fatty acid profile, and milk ingredients such as milk powders are not available there either. Therefore, the continuous efforts by a number of local producers (including the members of the PlumpyField® network) to use local ingredients, to reduce their carbon footprint and to contribute to economic and social development, are not systema-



tically taken into account by UN agencies (UNICEF/WFP) and NGOs in their purchasing processes.

THE THORNY ISSUE OF PACKAGING

The new specifications also concern the product's packaging and confirm the minimal durability date (DDM), which is two years. Without a cold chain, the product should maintain all its nutritional properties, its consistency should be stable, and the packets should remain sealed for two years. Given the climatic conditions in which they are used (often very hot or very humid), and the oily consistency of the product, extremely hard-wearing packaging was developed which is difficult to recycle. And, unfortunately, countries affected by malnutrition rarely have facilities where waste can be efficiently recycled or destroyed. What is more, mothers take the packets with them, sometimes to remote villages, and collecting them is complicated for the health centres or NGOs who manage the nutritional centres and distribute the RUTFs.

Though the nutritional quality of the products should of course be preserved, is a DDM of two years really essential? Given that these are emergency products that are only ordered when funds for a specific emergency have been secured, they should be used relatively quickly.

The Nutriset Group looked into the idea of reducing packaging at the source (modifying the composition of the packets, redesigning the packaging of boxes in order to use less plastic film, and recycling pallets). Though a lot of proposals were not taken up (transforming packaging into tatami mats, furniture, bricks, insulating fibre drapes, cool boxes, mobile incineration units), one was a success: the Eat&Play Box. It consists of reusing a pre-cut part of the boxes as toys for the children who receive food aid. It is another tool that



The continuous efforts by a number of local producers (including the members of the PlumpyField® network) to use local ingredients, to reduce their carbon footprint and to contribute to economic and social development, are not systematically taken into account by UN agencies (UNICEF/WFP) and NGOs in their purchasing processes.





health officers can use to stimulate children's cognitive development and reinforce the impact of nutritional interventions. Though the nutritional content of each meal counts in the development of the brain which forms hundreds of connections each second, 15 minutes of play is enough to trigger thousands of brain connections. In the field, stimulating the child, particularly through play, complements the nutritional treatment and helps the child to recover and reduce developmental delays. It was such a good idea that it is going to be taken up by UNICEF for all its suppliers.



When children are treated for acute malnutrition, apart from the specifications that provide a strict framework, humanitarian buyers and donors rarely have to comply with strict demands for green or more environmentally friendly products, and they are rarely prepared to pay more for these.



The Nutriset Group's Packaging teams are currently working on a packet that respects the constraints and can be recycled. But questions remain about how the packets will be collected and whether it will be possible to recycle them locally?

CONCLUSION

Though commitments are made by donors and international organisations, and charters are published to promote good practice in terms of environmental impact, the purchasing policies of humanitarian actors are not in keeping with these major commitments. When children are treated for acute malnutrition, apart from the specifications that provide a strict framework, humanitarian buyers and donors rarely have to comply with strict demands for green or more environmentally friendly products, and they are rarely prepared to pay more for these. Indeed, paying more to protect the environment would mean not being able to procure as much treatment and therefore treating fewer children.

Despite these different issues, it should also be noted that the 'One Health' approach is beginning to make inroads. The objective is no longer simply to reduce our waste or our carbon footprint, but to understand the interdependence of lifeforms, the fragile balance



that needs to be preserved so that the planet, human beings and animals live in harmony and in good health: the health of one depends on the health of the others. It is an approach that will no doubt help more and more people to realise that practices need to change. ❖

Claire Fehrenbach

*Advocacy Lead
Groupe Nutriset*



Groundnut crop in Burkina Faso © Groupe Nutriset



interview

with Pierre Hauselmann

Pierre Hauselmann is Partner at Pi Ethics and Compliance, a consultancy firm based in Switzerland. Until June 2022, he was the first Executive Director of the Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative; an NGO created to provide independent quality assurance in the humanitarian and development sector. Before being at HQAI, he was Head of Verification at HAP International. He moderated the writing group that developed the final version of the CHS. Pierre has 25 years of experience in ethical standard development, certification and verification. He is a founding member of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and collaborated with a number of schemes in the sustainable development sector, including Fairtrade and Social Accountability International. He participated as technical expert in the development of several ISO standards on environmental management in representation of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) International.



To what extent do you think quality issues have prevented the sector from being more environmentally friendly in recent years?

Pierre Hauselmann: I don't think that is the right question. Yes, aid quality and accountability have been of central concern in recent years while environmental aspects are only just beginning to be taken into consideration seriously. But I don't think we can say that the first issue is preventing the other from being taken into account. The fundamental problem comes from our society as a whole which is used to neglecting the environment and prioritising more immediate considerations. And the aid sector is not unique in this respect. Whereas it should have been obvious that the environment is an integral part of aid quality, just like accountability, we have compartmentalised quality, accountability and the environment. As a result, the numerous direct and indirect references to the environment (at least ten) in the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) have more or less gone unnoticed. Though these references exist, the CHS unfortunately focuses only on local environmental aspects and does not take into consideration that global aspects can have very local consequences – I'm thinking, particularly, of climate change, but not only. The current revision of the CHS is an opportunity to be more explicit and, above all, to address environmental issues from a more global perspective. At the same time, we shouldn't try to make the CHS an environmental standard: that is not what it is for.



To what extent can standards help to make the sector more environmentally friendly? What are their limits and what are the alternatives?

P. H.: Standards not only provide a framework in which mechanisms of all kinds can operate, but also allow the effectiveness of these mechanisms to be measured. From that point of view, a well-designed standard and an independent and rigorous system for evaluating compliance - which, together, form the standard system - can lead to significant improvement, as has been shown in numerous sectors. In the aid sector, this is becoming really obvious since the implementation of the CHS.

In all sectors where conditions vary, particularly those that involve human beings, the big question is how to get the right balance between flexibility and prescription. Otherwise, the standard system either becomes too lax or too prescriptive. In both cases, it loses its relevance and becomes a barrier.

There are two main families of standards: technical standards with very clear results-based demands, which are often quantitative; and system management standards which require the existence of processes that are supposed to guarantee the quality of an object or a process. This approach was developed in the 1950s for the automo-

bile sector which was diversifying significantly at that time. The famous ISO 9000 standard ensures that processes exist to guarantee that products have a constant level of quality, but does not define what this quality should be. This approach is much more flexible than the other one, and theoretically it is more adapted to the aid sector, but it has the disadvantage of allowing almost any level of quality.



In all sectors where conditions vary, particularly those that involve human beings, the big question is how to get the right balance between flexibility and prescription. Otherwise, the standard system either becomes too lax or too prescriptive. In both cases, it loses its relevance and becomes a barrier.





In the 1990s, new 'ethical' systems of standards appeared. These combined the two previous approaches: they defined a system and certain results that the system was supposed to achieve. The CHS inverted this approach: it defines the quality of the service that affected people are supposed to receive and gives indications about the kind of management system that can ensure that the level of quality remains constant. The CHS nevertheless fundamentally remains a system standard.

The reason for such a long introduction was to justify a simple answer: standards have an important role to play in making the system more environmentally friendly. To do this, they not only have to get the right balance between



You can't develop a standard without a holistic vision of its different impacts, beyond the issue that it is supposed to tackle. This means that ALL the parties involved should participate significantly.



flexibility and dictates, but they also need to be combined with a rigorous and independent system for checking compliance, which allows mechanisms to be attached as incentives for putting them in place. The CHS provides this framework in an exemplary manner, and it is by far the best example that I have worked with in my professional career, despite the limits I mentioned before.

However, no matter how important they are to meet environmental challenges, standards are not a panacea. We therefore shouldn't be talking about alternatives, but of complementary actions and mechanisms to put in place. Any approach that tended to limit this complementary aspect would be extremely negative.

What would be your advice to achieve the balance that you are talking about?

P. H.: There are techniques that exist, but above all, you need to know how to improvise. Technically, you need to ensure that the development (or revision) of a standard is as participatory as possible and involves all the different stakeholders. First of all, you need to map the stakeholders involved, taking two variables into consideration: the impact that they can have on the standard and the impact that the standard can have on them.



Next, participation needs to be much more than just consultation: you therefore need to analyse and understand the negotiating power of these stakeholders and rebalance this as much as possible in the decision-making mechanisms. These mechanisms need to be defined in advance and should not change once the process is underway. In my opinion – and in my experience – this is the only way to create an environment where the weakest parties in a negotiation are not dominated by the most powerful parties (who generally insist that decisions will be fair due to their benevolence).

You also have to think of each step outside the box to consider the potential impact of the standard, even beyond its operational framework. This is easier when you are revising an existing standard because you have experience with the existing version. In this case, you should only change what is necessary, and change no more than is needed to resolve the problem. And you need to identify the real problems. For example, if a standard is not used a lot by a potential category of users: is the problem related to the standard itself, to the communication related to the standard, and/or incentives (or counter-incentives) to do with its use? And lastly, is it really the case, or is it simply a perception?

In any case, you need a great deal of finesse, based on solid experience of standardisation and its verification me-

thods, beyond a single sector which, by definition, will have its prejudices.



What do you think about the Nutriset Group's experience?

P. H.: This confirms that you can't develop a standard without a holistic vision of its different impacts, beyond the issue that it is supposed to tackle. This means that ALL the parties involved should participate significantly. It also confirms that standards that are purely performance-related are only relevant for well-defined processes that are carried out in well-defined conditions.

The idea of providing food that is safe is a laudable objective. But it's obvious that the institutions who developed these foods were wearing blinkers... ❌

In my experience...

A Cameroonian organisation's role in the RESILAC project

by *Samira HABIBA ABDOULAYE*

As a RESILAC implementing partner, our civil society organisation, *Association des Jeunes pour le Développement du Monde Rural (AJED-MR)* was mandated to carry out Pillar 2 activities related to economic recovery with Action contre la Faim (ACF) and CARE. With ACF, we conducted 'Food security and livelihoods' activities, such as farmer field schools, cereal banks and the restoration of degraded land. These involved innovative environmentally friendly and agro-ecological approaches that we learned from ACF. With CARE, we carried out 'socio-economic integration' activities, including the setting up of Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), training young people in key activities of their choice, helping them to set up their microprojects, and supporting value chains.

A new kind of partnership

First of all, the RESILAC project provided us with the opportunity to engage in genuine collaboration with ACF and CARE. This involved the effective transfer of numerous activities with specific performance criteria (a set of clearly defined activities for civil society organisations (CSOs) with expected results that are evaluated each year). In addition, we attended several capacity reinforcement sessions related to these activities, with the objective of increasing the quality of our operations (technical training related to the transferred activities, such as setting up VSLAs, the socio-economic integration of young people, integrating gender issues, agro-ecological practices, and topics such as the financial procedures of donors and partners (ACF and CARE), accountability and humanitarian principles). Pillar 3's organisational support included an organisational assessment of AJED-MR at the beginning of the collaboration with ACF and CARE. This highlighted the organisation's strengths, weaknesses and shortcomings and led to the development of a Capacity Reinforcement Plan including monitoring of project implementation and an annual evaluation of progress made. This support helped us to get to know the procedures of donors and partners (CARE and ACF), improve



accounting tools and draw up a strategic plan defining the organisation's objectives for the future. Lastly, the organisation's inclusion at the strategic decision-making level during RESILAC coordination meetings was new for us, as was the sharing of key information. Indeed, previous partnerships with international organisations were essentially limited to meetings to monitor activities carried out. In contrast, with ACF and CARE, CSOs take part in strategic planning meetings as well. Information related to advocacy and security are also shared. All these aspects helped to improve the quality of the activities carried out as well as their visibility, and the visibility of the RESILAC project in general. Lastly, CSOs gained in credibility among the population, and among traditional, religious, communal and administrative authorities. This was the case, for example, with the transferal to CSOs of technical training for young people, which led to a contract with local state technical services. This helped to build a network and establish links between civil society and the State.

The difficulties encountered with this kind of partnership

Because we are much more used to top-down partnerships where terms of reference need to be validated by the lead partners before implementation, this new kind of partnership led to some misunderstanding when the project was launched, particularly in terms of the approach. And, it should be pointed out that the RESILAC project's co-construction approach, with autonomous implementing partners, was new both for CSO staff and for ACF and CARE staff. There were also some problems with the joint planning of activities with the two lead partners. These were nevertheless resolved thanks to clarification meetings that helped all the stakeholders to understand the approach and improve communication. However, CSOs did have some problems implementing the different procedures of ACF and CARE. Even though, in theory, there was a single agreement with the two partners, depending on which partner was invol-



I think it would be appropriate to involve civil society and/or local organisations as early as the project design phase, so that they can gain more experience in partnerships.





ved, the administrative and financial procedures were different for the transferred activities, (for example, two distinct monthly financial reports had to be written to respect the procedures of each organisation for a single project).

Ideas for ways to improve partnerships with international aid organisations

I think it would be appropriate to involve civil society and/or local organisations as early as the project design phase, so that they can gain more experience in partnerships. This would allow CSOs to be co-applicants and not simply solicited to implement activities. It would also be useful for international organisations who are partners to harmonise their procedures in order to optimise their assimilation by the partner CSOs. In terms of partnerships with international aid organisations in general, the approach that was tested by the RESILAC project seems sound. In addition to reinforcing the technical and organisational capacities of local organisations, it leads to a genuine transfer of key activities and budget. This helps CSOs to develop and improve the quality of their operations with the populations that they are closest to. This effective transferal



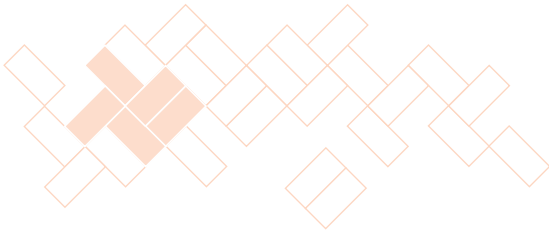
© AJED-MR (Association des Jeunes pour le Développement du Monde Rural)



of activities, with capacity reinforcement, allows partner CSOs to acquire expertise in different areas, such as agro ecology. The partnership with ACF and CARE has also allowed CSOs to acquire different tools and competencies in the following areas: organisational evaluation diagrams, the development of a ten-year strategic plan, setting up a project and fund-raising. These different points allow CSOs to become more autonomous and will improve the quality of their future partnerships. What is more, having established relations with the communes and the local state technical services, RESILAC has opened the door to other, longer-term partnerships. And lastly, thanks to a capacity reinforcement plan with projects that are not principally funded by ACF or CARE, certain projects were led by the CSOs themselves. ❖

Samira Habiba Abdoulaye

RESILAC Head of Project with AJED-MR



Increasing the confidence and leadership of national organisations by applying the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS)

by Bonaventure Gbétoho Sokpoh

The vibrant discussions at Groupe URD's Autumn School 2022, regarding quality initiatives viewed through the prism of 'localisation', showed how eager local and national organisations are to demonstrate their existing capacity and increase their leadership. The experiences of local and national organisations from Cameroon, Uganda and Pakistan showed that progress is being made based on ethical partnerships and the application of the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) on Quality and Accountability.

CLOSEST TO THE PEOPLE WE SERVE

Local and national aid workers are the ones who walk the last miles to reach the people and communities affected by crisis, sometimes in difficult security and transport conditions. Their proxi-

mity to communities means that they have a better understanding of the languages and cultures where they work. Their response to the COVID-19 pandemic, where 'cultural access' to communities was crucial, is a good illustration of the importance of local and national capacities.

The critical role of local and national actors in humanitarian and development action is widely recognised and is fortunately receiving more attention at policy levels. Strengthening local leadership in humanitarian response is one of the 'enabling priorities' of Grand Bargain 2.0¹ and international actors have committed to it through

several initiatives including Charter for Change², and the recently launched Pledge For Change³.

However, power imbalances are still a persistent problem in the humanitarian and development sector. Interna-

1 - <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2021-07/%28EN%29%20Grand%20Bargain%202.0%20Framework.pdf>

2 - <https://charter4change.org/>

3 - <https://pledgeforchange2030.org/metrics-accountability/>



tional agencies are still at the centre of power, while national and local actors at the forefront of delivery find themselves relegated to the margins. National actors continue to face a number of tough challenges, including:

- securing core funding to enable them to invest in their quality and accountability systems;
- inequality in their relationships with international partners;
- the multiple partner capacity assessment (PCA) and due diligence (DD) requirements from different international partners.

ETHICAL PARTNERSHIPS: REFLECTIONS ON THE AUTUMN SCHOOL DISCUSSION

I was delighted to take part in Groupe URD's Autumn School 2022 and to be on the panel for the session that looked at quality initiatives through the prism of 'localisation'. The perspectives of local and national organisations were presented via video calls and recordings. A representative from a local organisation involved in the RESILAC project⁴ in North Cameroon spoke of how they felt stronger and more confident due to ethical partnerships with international NGOs. It is always inspiring to hear from a local or national organisation that is growing in confidence to engage with international partners on a more equal basis.

« In the partnership for the RESILAC project, we have been able to influence the project based on our organisation's own strategy that we have been supported to develop. In the past, international organisations were asking us to implement specific activities without giving space for us to contribute to the design with our knowledge and experience in the context. »

*Samira Habiba Abdoulaye,
Association des Jeunes pour le Développement du Monde Rural
(Cameroonian Youth Association),
a national partner working on the RESILAC project*

4 - <https://www.resilac.net/>



THE ROLE OF THE CHS IN STRENGTHENING NATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Maximising the potential of the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS)⁵ is one key focus area for the CHS Alliance strategy for 2022- 2025⁶. In the past few years, interest in the CHS and CHS verification⁷ has significantly grown and today the Standard is widely recognised as a measurable framework that sets out the essential elements for principled humanitarian action and as a tool that helps organisations to improve (see the *Humanitarian Accountability Reports 2020*⁸ and 2022⁹).

CHS Alliance, together with its members and partners, are continuing their efforts to make sure the CHS is applied as closely as possible to people and communities affected by crises. I am responsible for the CHS Alliance's activities to promote the CHS among local and national actors – those who are closest to the people and communities affected by crises. The experiences shared by local and national organisations during CHS verification processes show that the

CHS is helping them in the following ways:

- ***Having their strengths formally recognised.*** Local and national organisations often feel that their competencies and efforts in terms of quality and accountability are not fully recognised by international actors. The CHS is a common standard for all organisations, regardless of size, budget, or geography. The related verification scheme¹⁰ (all verification options including self-assessment, independent verification and certification) provides a structured and systematic process to assess the degree to which an organisation has met the CHS Commitments. The verification results show where local and national organisations have improved in recent years. As a result, CHS-certified local and national organisations are deconstructing the idea that they are weak and unable to manage resources responsibly.

- ***Being in charge of their own capacity development.*** Many 'capacity strengthening' processes and projects are designed and driven by international organisations. CHS verification processes allow local and national

5 - <https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/>

6 - <https://www.chsalliance.org/get-support/resource/chs-alliance-strategy-2022-2025/>

7 - <https://www.chsalliance.org/verify/>

8 - <https://www.chsalliance.org/get-support/resource/har-2020/>

9 - <https://www.chsalliance.org/har2022/>

10 - <https://www.chsalliance.org/get-support/resource/chs-verification-scheme-overview/>



organisations to identify areas for improvement and establish their own capacity development priorities for the following years. As a result, they are redefining their relations with international partners and reducing the power imbalance.

- **Building staff and organisational confidence.** Several testimonies from organisations applying the CHS have shown that staff members are re-motivated and proud of their organisation's work. They explain that, in addition to highlighting the organisation's capacities, the CHS verification process triggered internal discussions on key aspects of the Standard and, most importantly, led to concrete improvement

measures and results. By highlighting their existing capacities and showing that they were committed to improving the quality of their work, the CHS verification process increased the confidence of the organisation to apply for more funding.

OVERCOMING SOME OF THE CHALLENGES OF CHS VERIFICATION

Local and national organisations applying the CHS have also highlighted challenges for them in engaging in the CHS verification process. The main challenge is the fact that they have limited financial and human resources

« TPO Uganda has been involved in CHS independent verification since 2018. The audit was a reality check for us. We have realised gaps we had regarding policies and practices. As result, we have taken the necessary measures, including reinforcing communication with communities and participation, developing safeguarding policy, and building a very robust financial management system. We have seen a growth in satisfaction of the people and communities we serve, and we see ourselves as much stronger than we were before the CHS verification. »

*Rehema Kajungu,
Deputy Country Director,
Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation - TPO Uganda*



« FRDP conducted a CHS self-assessment to assess our capacities and improve the quality and accountability in our humanitarian response mechanism and development projects. As a result, our donors and other actors are recognising FRDP as more responsible, committed, strengthened and effective responders. »

*Samreen Qaimi,
MEAL Manager,
Fast Rural Development Program – FRDP*

because funding is restricted primarily to projects with limited overhead costs. This makes it difficult to invest in the CHS verification process. To address these challenges, the CHS Alliance reviewed the CHS self-assessment tool to make it accessible via an online survey and considerably reduced the time focal points spend on the process¹¹. For independent verification and certification, a 'facilitation fund' is made available to cover up to 90% of the audit costs and increase organisations' internal capacities to engage in the CHS verification process¹². The CHS Alliance is also conducting a review to improve the accessibility of the CHS verification scheme for national actors.

LOOKING AHEAD: HAVE YOUR SAY ON THE FUTURE OF THE CHS

The Core Humanitarian Standard is currently in the process of being reviewed to make it more accessible and relevant for people facing situations of vulnerability and crisis. The revision process was launched in May 2022 with the objective of improving quality and accountability, based on the commitments made to affected people and communities. The revision will last until the end of 2023¹³. It builds on the feedback and views gathered during the 2022 and 2023 consultation phases. It is therefore a great opportunity for local and national organisations to influence the CHS and ensure their experiences and situations are duly taken into consideration in the updated Stan-

11 - <https://www.chsalliance.org/verify/>

12 - <https://www.hqai.org/en/our-work/hqai-facilitation-fund/>

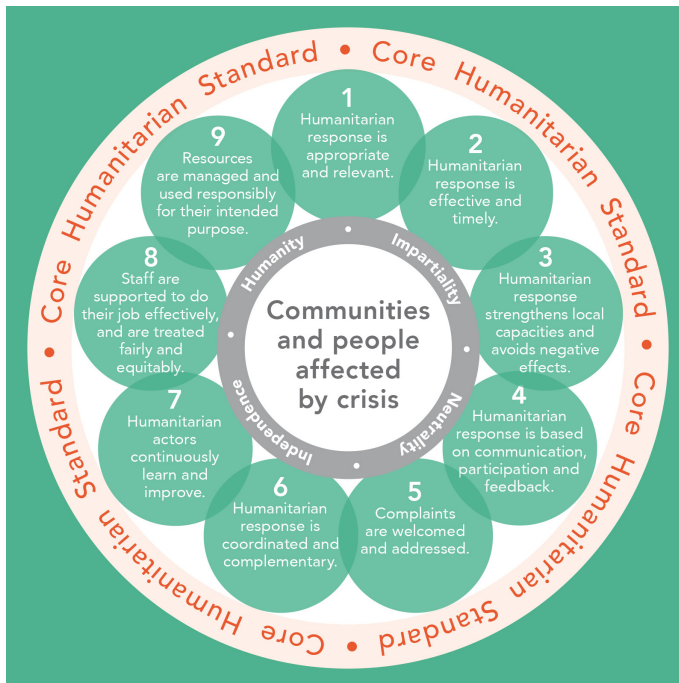
13 - <https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/chs-revision>



dard, so it can become a strong tool for locally led humanitarian and development work. We warmly welcome all points of view. Please contact the CHS revision managers through CHSrevision@chsalliance.org to engage in the CHS revision process. ❖

Bonaventure Gbétoho Sokpoh,

Conseiller senior en politique et sensibilisation, CHS Alliance





point of view

A lexicon for a new culture of solidarity

by Charlotte Dufour



Charlotte Dufour has worked on food systems and resilience for more than twenty years. She has worked for different international NGOs and UN agencies, including 3 years at Groupe URD (2002-2005) as a researcher during which she contributed to the Quality COMPAS and the Participation Handbook. She is currently a member of Groupe URD's Governing Board which she represents within the CHS Revision Steering Committee.

The major investments made in the last three decades to improve aid quality have been motivated by a sincere desire to contribute to the well-being of individuals whose lives have been affected by crises of all kinds. These efforts have been driven by genuine solidarity and a desire to be close to those in need. They are an expression of humanity that is consistent with the very meaning and essence of humanitarian action.

And yet, these efforts have contributed to making the international aid system more rigid – while experience from the field has shown how essential flexibility is to meet the needs caused by crises. Humanitarians are committed to increasing accountability towards affected people by listening better, being more respectful and meeting their

needs more effectively. But accountability approaches often create cumbersome procedures that can end up as 'box-ticking' exercises. Quality approaches often make aid more technocratic, which can stifle human relations¹.

The general discourse within the sector on 'participation' – which has been in fashion for more than twenty years – and attempts to adopt 'participatory approaches', show that there is a desire for more 'horizontal' relations between aid organisations and beneficiaries. However, this also shows the intrinsically top-down nature of the paradigm in which all operators take action: NGOs, donors, local institutions, civil society organisations, and populations. If one participates in something, it is, by definition, external to oneself. It is clear that

1 - See issue 20 of *Humanitarian Aid on the Move* on 'agility': <https://www.urd.org/en/review-hem/humanitarian-aid-on-the-move-n20/>



the 'participation revolution' is going round in circles. The same is true of the discourse on localisation: you can only localise something if it is brought in from elsewhere. What is being done to build on what already exists and to adopt genuinely locally-led approaches?²

Humanitarian language betrays the fact that we are prisoners of a paradigm that we want to escape from. This language is beginning to be criticised³ and more and more voices are being raised to denounce the colonialism, paternalism and even racism that are inherent to the humanitarian model as it has unfolded over the decades⁴. These are strong, destabilising words that naturally can offend – or even hurt – the individuals who work body and soul to help men and women in distress, sometimes losing their lives, or at least their health, in doing so.

How do we break this vicious circle?

When we are aiming to transform a system (whatever it may be), it is common to focus on the structures, policies and procedures on which it is based. However, experience shows that changing structures, policies and procedures rarely leads to the changes that are desired (such as increasing the quality of an operation or improving accountability). Why ? Because the human dynamics involved are not taken into account. The work of Myron Rogers and Margaret Wheatley might provide keys to unlock this situation. John Atkinson writes this about their work: 'Myron suggests we should spend our leadership attention on identity, information and relationships. That this creates an environment of trust, which in turn ensures we address the appropriate rather than historical actions and that together this will make work in the public service altogether more meaningful for those involved.'⁵ (see diagram below)

2 - See issue 23 of *Humanitarian Aid on the Move*: <https://www.urd.org/en/review-hem/humanitarian-aid-on-the-move-no-23/>

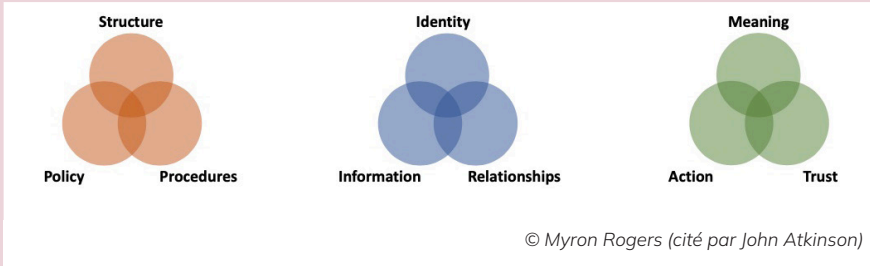
3 - See the article by Tammam Aloudat, « *The Damage aid workers can do with just their words* », 27 March 2021.

4 - A list of resources on the subject are compiled here: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2022/08/12/Decolonising-aid-a-reading-and-resource-list>

5 - John Atkinson, *Total Place: a practitioner's guide to doing things differently*, p. 14-15 (<https://www.leadershipcentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/tppractitionerguide-.pdf>).



point of view



So, if we want to rebuild the humanitarian sector and abandon this 'top-down' (not to say colonialist) approach, it is not enough to revise our *structures, policies and procedures*. We have to question our identities, the nature of the relationships between actors, and the way that information circulates in the system. We therefore have to include the



Experience shows that changing structures, policies and procedures rarely leads to the changes that are desired (such as increasing the quality of an operation or improving accountability). Why? Because the human dynamics involved are not taken into account.



cultural context and the power structures that forge our *identities*, our *relationships* and the *information* that we produce/interpret, given the extent to which the colonial/post-colonial context in which the humanitarian system developed at the end of the 20th century remains a determining factor.

The redefinition of our identities, the evolution of our relationships and the transformation of information will require in-depth work at the individual, institutional and cultural levels. An analysis of this kind goes beyond the scope of the present article, but we can already concentrate on the language that we use, because changing how we speak could help us to become more conscious of certain aspects of our identity and our relationships, and thus lead to certain changes...

Below is a new lexicon that could help a new paradigm for the solidarity sector to emerge. It is nevertheless essential to point out that *a change in vocabulary is far from being enough*, particularly if it is used to mask persistent vertical



and paternalistic relations. These new words can not replace the institutional, structural and cultural changes that need to take place. But they might help to revise the *'mindset'* and *'heartset'* with which each individual engages in solidarity-based relations. Because the more we change individually, the more we will be able to change the bodies and organisations that we are part of.

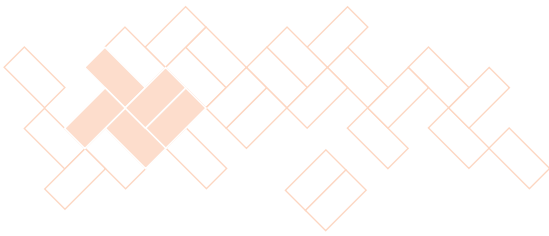
To conclude, it is important to underline that this kind of approach and vocabulary is already common in certain spheres, such as cooperation between local civil society or governmental institutions, whether in France or in the 'South'. Opportunities for learning therefore already exist. For my part, I believe that, in the future, relations of solidarity

should be guided by three values or attitudes: the ability to *listen*, to *be present* and to *share*. ❖

Charlotte Dufour

*Member of Groupe URD's
Governing Board
and co-founder of Listening Inspires*

Current humanitarian aid lexicon	Proposed new solidarity lexicon
Aid	Collaboration / mutual support
Appropriation	Co-creation
Participation	Collaboration
Capacity reinforcement	Peer learning
Vulnerable people	Actors
Beneficiaries	Partners
Implementing partners / Service providers	Partners / colleagues
Empowerment	Accompaniment / networking support / connection
Localisation	The term becomes irrelevant and obsolete because we apply an organic partnership approach based on local realities.



Quality & partnerships: the challenges facing Action contre la Faim in Ukraine?

by *Virginie Brisson*

Action contre la Faim (ACF) is an international NGO that combats malnutrition throughout the world, whatever the cause (conflict, climate change, poverty, unequal access to water, to healthcare, etc.). For a number of years now, it has adopted a charter that states that its actions will be neutral, transparent, non-discriminatory, professional and independent, with free and direct access for victims. The conflict in Ukraine has underlined how complex these principles are and shown how important it is to explain them to the actors on the ground, and to communicate about them.

ACF is very attached to the quality of its activities in general and evaluates these based on established quality standards such as the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS). Its emergency response strategy includes systematic evaluations which allow it to analyse its operations. In Ukraine, a real-time evaluation is being carried out to learn lessons from the first three months of the response. The main focus will be operational performance and it will aim to highlight systemic and contextual problems as well as opportunities and lessons. It will help to reinforce the experience of the organisation, which continually needs

to adapt to the changing context on the ground.

THE 'UKRAINE RESPONSE': WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Action contre la Faim was present in Ukraine from 2015 to 2019. It had not had any activities there since, but it was still registered in the country. When its staff were deployed at the end of February 2022, its strategy was to support local initiatives. The organisation had understood that Ukrainian civil society was

sufficiently strong and that it was important to avoid 'duplication'. The aim was therefore to identify local partners and work with, and through, them. At the same time, direct operations remained possible if they were needed.

ACF often conducts operations via partners and has a 'Partnerships' policy, even though this approach is not always recommended or possible in emergency contexts. In countries where the organisation has been working for a long time, emergency preparedness plans are established and updated each year, and opera-



tional methods are discussed with the partner organisations. Developing a partnership takes time, so if the operational methods are not decided in advance, this can hold up the delivery of assistance. For the Ukraine response, it took several weeks to meet the partners, understand their values and needs, and establish a common response strategy. The whole process took longer than usual as ACF and the civil society organisations were unfamiliar with each other's way of working. As always, procedures and a validation system were put in place to ensure that activities were transparent, ethical and accountable, as well as neutral, which is so crucial in the Ukrainian context. Again, clearly explaining the organisation's position took time. The presence of so many international aid organisations took up even more time as it required particularly complex coordination.

A VARIETY OF ACTORS WITH DIFFERENT STRENGTHS

In addition to international humanitarian organisations, this crisis has involved a myriad of other actors with different and sometimes overlapping operations. These aid initiatives sometimes had their own funds and technical capacity from the private sector, a dimension that also had to be taken into account in analysing the assistance. Individual civil society and volunteer

initiatives raised many questions in relation to neutrality, protection, ethics and quality of aid. For example, the mountains of clothes that arrived in Poland subsequently had to be managed, or the fact that the refugees were welcomed by volunteers with candyfloss and sweets which, according to the doctors in the transit centres, often made children sick. Worse still, the spontaneity of the assistance meant that malicious networks were able to take advantage of the situation, with refugees not knowing who they should speak to when they needed help.

However, it is important to mention how active private actors were, which is not typical in international humanitarian responses. In Poland, in the transit centres, for example, telephone operators provided refugees with SIM cards so that they could stay in touch with their loved ones. For its part, Action contre la Faim worked with a company in Ukraine that had made metal barriers before the conflict. It allowed its kitchens to be used by a network of volunteers to prepare hot meals and deliver these to people who were isolated, unable to move or living in the metro.

Businesses and private actors are not very familiar with international aid donors. Working with them is therefore a challenge for ACF. For example, it is rare for institutional donor funds to be used for a partnership with a private actor as donors tend to want to work



with formally recognised civil society organisations. Some donors therefore suggested to ACF that it should consider the partner as a supplier. But the organisation did not want to give them this role because this would have meant being in the position of a client and would have given a commercial dimension to the partnership, whereas this was not the case. ACF wanted to help to produce meals and contribute to this effort, either by providing financial support or expertise in setting up projects. The objective was not to formalise the relationship with a contract, but to promote this work, without any lucrative dimension. Unfortunately, very few donors were open to this approach, which nevertheless allowed up to 17 000 hot meals to be distributed per day.

From the beginning, ACF was aware of the need to support volunteers due to the difficulty of the context. Working day and night, combined with the emotional impact, rapidly caused fatigue, and sometimes even exhaustion. International NGOs have a role to play here in terms of long-term aid, and though they can be criticised for being too slow or procedural, using their professional apparatus to relay spontaneous initiatives has its advantages. Volunteers have to eventually go back to work, and the arrival of professionals means that there are people present for a certain duration, who rotate and who are trained in providing assistance to people in distress.



© ACF/Catianne Tijerina



ADAPTING TO EMERGENCY CONTEXTS: RAPID IMPACT PROJECTS

Action contre la Faim adopted a flexible approach between what it was possible to do and the resources made available to the organisations on the ground. Thus, in order to accompany spontaneous local activities as well as possible, the organisation adjusted its usual practices by developing rapid-impact projects. These are based on very small amounts of funding per partner (less than 20 000 euros) and a very short period (less than 3 months). They make it possible to observe the partner at work, and improve understanding of each other's capacities and way of working. They help to test ways of managing the partnership. And they are a way of ascertaining the added value of working together and the possible need to develop a joint action plan between the organisations.

Before deciding to take part in a short project, ACF discusses minimal compliance. That is to say, it screens staff members and establishes the terms required for the partnership agreement based on discussions between the parties. Minimal compliance means, for example, financial transparency, respecting its Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse policy or the principles of neutrality and impartiality. To support its staff in this area, special directives have been developed for the

Ukrainian context. To date, 8 rapid impact projects have been launched for around 100 000 euros.

As the months have passed, partnerships have become stronger, with more activities and increased funding. Three months into the war, partnership strategies have even been established. Though ACF has been flexible in terms of the reports it has asked its partners to provide, it has been strict in terms of respecting its principles, particularly in terms of transparency and accountability towards beneficiaries. The partners, for their part, understand what ACF expects of them even though they find the reporting that international organisations engage in extremely demanding given the tools and human resources that it requires. The projects also involve donors who require actors to report on their activities using precise indicators (number of beneficiaries in relation to sex, age, etc.).

As the context has evolved rapidly, ACF has had to adapt its approach over time. At the beginning of the conflict, assistance was needed in the west and staff on the ground did not know if it would be possible to gain access to the east. The organisation thought that the security situation would be too dangerous and that it would be complicated to gain authorisations to travel. Going into 'grey areas' to assist the response is one of ACF's priorities, but due to the



situation, solid security systems need to be developed to gain access and for logistics. As a new actor in this context, this takes time, particularly in terms of the rules of engagement to protect civilians and humanitarians, which are not yet very clear in these areas due to the conflict. ACF is currently developing its capacity to take action in the east and south of the country while trying to gain access to the most difficult areas.

THE COMPLEXITY OF HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES IN TIMES OF WAR: ACF'S RED LINE

For Action contre la Faim, as it says in its Charter of Principles, 'a victim is a victim'. The organisation therefore maintains strict neutrality in terms of politics and religion even though it does sometimes denounce human rights violations and obstacles to humanitarian operations. At the same time, it is very complicated to talk about the principle of neutrality in a country that is mobilised in a war effort.

The army has an important protection role in Ukrainian society which can be explained by a long military heritage. For example, when you pay your electricity bill over the phone there are adverts that ask for a donation to be made to the army for humanitarian action. The territory where ACF is present is subject to martial law where the au-

thorities can ask any actor to give part of the work that they do. What is more, the majority of ACF's action is taken via partners, many of whom are public services who take part in the war effort, and can be mobilised.

For all these reasons, humanitarian action is not exempt from providing aid to army forces, even though ACF would refuse to do this. As such, repairing a water distribution system with the company Vodokanal can obviously, eventually, lead to the armed forces receiving water. The same can be said of the assistance to municipal authorities in organising temporary shelters as those who fight during the day are also those who take shelter with their families in the evening. Without forgetting that stock of any kind – whether food or material goods – can be requisitioned by the government at any time.

There might be more room for manoeuvre with civil society partners, but, here again, it is not so simple. For example, if we consider a partner whose activities include the knitting of camouflaged netting by elderly people, what should be done when the same organisation also provides medical care and food to thousands of people? As a guideline, ACF specifies that assistance is for civilians and that all collaboration stops if an activity is officially for the war effort or to gather arms and munitions. The organisation informed its donors about this on ar-



rival in Ukraine and they have been flexible because they are not neutral either. ACF reinforces its neutrality in relation to them by repeating that its Charter of Principles states that 'a victim is a victim', and by campaigning to have access to all people in need.

CONCLUSION

Action contre la Faim's assistance in Ukraine in 2022 has therefore been very specific – unique even. From the beginning of its involvement, it has worked in partnership with a large number of actors of very different kinds, whether private, public (11 municipal authorities and Vodokanal), NGOs or citizen-based initiatives. Six months since it began its

operations, ACF has already collaborated with thirty-two partners.

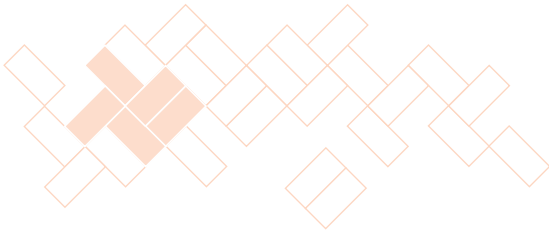
This unprecedented rapidity was made possible by the capacity of civil society and private organisations to organise in the face of the crisis and new threats. The support provided by ACF has been well received in general by the different stakeholders. Significant motivation and solidarity have helped to establish the common ground required to assist people in need. ✂

Virginie Brisson

*Emergency Monitoring,
Systems and Analytics Advisor
at Action contre la Faim*



© ACF/Gonzalo Höhr



The humanitarian response in Ukraine: reconsidering 'our' principles and models

by François Grünewald

The war in Ukraine has brought major challenges for the humanitarian sector. This article analyses these challenges and the lessons that have subsequently been learned. It is based on a real-time evaluation of the humanitarian response to the crisis caused by the war (see references at the end of the article).

A DIFFERENT CONTEXT WHICH IMPLIES DIFFERENT WAYS OF WORKING

When humanitarian actors arrived in Ukraine, many were surprised by how active state actors from Ukraine and neighbouring countries were, and particularly by the large numbers of extremely active volunteers. International aid organisations were rapidly faced with the major question of how to work with Ukrainian, Polish, Romanian and Moldavian civil society, as well as local municipal authorities and institutions.

Ukrainian civil society (citizen and volunteer-based groups, NGOs, churches and diasporas all over the

world), decentralised institutions (such as municipal authorities) and state institutions immediately joined the general movement to resist the Russian invasion and were fully mobilised to assist the huge numbers of displaced persons, combining solidarity, humanitarian aid, civic action and support for defence efforts. This combination destabilised a certain number of international aid organisations who are used to

working in contexts where the state is generally weak, services are dysfunctional and local NGOs are looking for funding. The Ukraine context also revealed serious misunderstanding between, on the one hand, an international humanitarian 'industry' that is very attached to its humanitarian principles, and on the other, the effervescence of a civil society that is mobilised as much to meet the needs of people in distress as to support the war effort. Every Ukrainian had a brother or sister, a mother or an uncle, on the front and was trying to assist them in different ways. There were three parallel aid processes: the first concerned assistance from diasporas, aimed at family members; the second was broader and aimed to provide assistance near com-



bat zones where vulnerable people were faced with considerable difficulties; and the third concerned providing appropriate assistance to displaced families. Existing measures within the international aid sector to control aid and mitigate the risk of diversion (due to the fear of corruption and misappropriation by mafia groups) made it all the more complicated to work with a very dynamic, but very disparate and unorganised civil society. In response to the bureaucratic demands of donors in terms of screening partners, procurement procedures, beneficiary registration, etc., Ukrainian actors invented numerous innovative accountability measures: file exchanges, taking photos of the beneficiaries receiving their parcels, and, above all, extensive use of the Diya system (meaning 'action' in Ukrainian), a digital application established by the government for civil status, social benefits (pensions, social assistance), taxes, etc.

Mobilising resources and assessing needs are at the heart of conventional humanitarian aid processes, with Flash Appeals, Humanitarian Needs Overviews and Humanitarian Response Plans. Yet, these processes do not take into account either endogenous dynamics, rooted in inter-personal solidarity networks, nor those related to social networks (Instagram, Telegram, WhatsApp, Facebook, etc.) that irrigate the Ukrainian community within the country and abroad. Indeed, it is much more

common for needs to be identified and requests for assistance to be made via these endogenous mechanisms than via those that the international aid sector is used to, with its questionnaires, its vulnerability analyses, its beneficiary classification systems, etc.

With this war in Europe, which was caused by a clear act of aggression and has led to colossal humanitarian needs, very significant resources have been



The Ukraine context also revealed serious misunderstanding between, on the one hand, an international humanitarian 'industry' that is very attached to its humanitarian principles, and on the other, the effervescence of a civil society that is mobilised as much to meet the needs of people in distress as to support the war effort.





mobilised: first, by the Ukrainian population and diaspora who have collected, sent and distributed considerable quantities of food, basic goods and medicines; and then, by European and North American civil societies, who have sent in-kind and cash donations. Unfortunately, it is difficult to quantify this huge effort of solidarity, but two things are certain. First, this aid has been, and continues to be, considerable, even though it appears to have decreased since July. Se-

cond, it was very quick to arrive at the beginning of the war (February-March 2022), both to help those on the road to exile, particularly in border areas, and inside the country, in response to 'needs assessments' carried out by international aid organisations. This 'classic' institutional international aid (UN agencies, major international NGOs and the Red Cross Movement) has also been considerable, reaching levels that had never been reached before¹, based on needs

1 - Ukraine Flash Appeal (March-August 2022) was for 4.7 billion US\$ (<https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-flash-appeal-march-august-2022-enruuk>).



Maidan square (Kiev), flags of remembrance for soldiers killed on the front © Groupe URD



analyses carried out by the humanitarian cluster mechanism and the tools of the REACH initiative. And yet, a significant proportion of needs have been under-funded. These concern what is normally the responsibility of municipal systems, a sector that is all the more critical given the systematic Russian bombing of 'critical infrastructure': electric power plants, urban heating systems and water supply networks.

THE 'TRADITIONAL' INTERNATIONAL AID SYSTEM'S LACK OF AGILITY

This context has brought major challenges due to the variety of operational contexts, including calmer zones in the west and centre of Ukraine, and zones where there is active conflict, and due to the constant changes in the way hostilities are conducted, including the recent mass bombings of civilian areas and infrastructure. International aid actors have needed to be, and still need to be, as agile as possible. But their agility is compromised by the procedures that they have to respect.

The Ukrainian state is organised and continues to be operational. Its administration is characterised by a mixture of cumbersome features inherited from the Soviet era and an impressive

level of modernisation, with the digitalisation of its procedures. This modernisation has also been embraced by a large part of Ukrainian society. Given these features, the international aid sector had difficulty knowing how to approach this context. This was made worse by the uncertainty about how the conflict would evolve, security problems and the variety of situations on the ground. NGOs with their own funds, or who have access to flexible donors, were able to quickly adopt a 'no regrets' approach. This is an approach that accepts that, due to the seriousness of an emergency context, decisions can be made with a relatively large margin of error. It is important here to point out the significant differences between organisations in terms of managing security and operational risks. This reflects the distribution of traditional aid actors that has already been described in other contexts². There is a 'centre of action' where there is a high concentration of needs and where it is relatively easy to provide assistance in a controlled manner. And there is the periphery, where it is more dangerous, needs are more dispersed, and there are more significant logistical and operational constraints. These are areas where, for a long time, only a limited number of actors were able to conduct operations (ICRC, MSF and a few other, particularly French, NGOs -

2 - For example in Eastern Chad in the 2010s, and in Haiti after the earthquake of 12 January 2010.



ACTED, Solidarités, Première Urgence Internationale, Triangle Génération Humanitaire, etc.). In Ukraine, a great deal of aid can only be implemented thanks to interaction with Ukrainian actors, and particularly with groups of volunteers. What is more, given the volatility of the context, it is essential to maintain dialogue with donors in



In Ukraine, a great deal of aid can only be implemented thanks to interaction with Ukrainian actors, and particularly with groups of volunteers. What is more, given the volatility of the context, it is essential to maintain dialogue with donors in order to increase the agility and pertinence of operations.



order to increase the agility and pertinence of operations. However, much of this room for manoeuvre is decided when contracts are negotiated and it depends on a relatively flexible definition of needs, types of beneficiaries and operational methods. Such flexibility limits the need to amend contracts, which is always very time-consuming. Close dialogue with donors to keep them informed of needs and changes is also essential³. One of the original aspects of this context is the absence of a system of humanitarian flights due to the fact that there is no air traffic control and the risks from the countless drones and missiles in the Ukrainian sky⁴. In the absence of UNHAS, all trips are by train or by car and therefore take a lot of time. As a result, work is done as much as possible by video-conference, which has numerous advantages, but makes 'field truth' exercises and negotiations about necessary adjustments much more abstract.

3 - See Stoddard A., Harvey P. et al., *Enabling the local response: Emerging humanitarian priorities in Ukraine March–May 2022*, Humanitarian Outcomes, 2022 (https://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/Ukraine_review_June_2022).

4 - UN, *Ukraine Flash Appeal (March–December 2022)* (<https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-2022-flash-appeal-funding-snapshot-8-august-2022>).



A VERY SPECIFIC AID COMBINING URBAN ENVIRONMENTS AND WAR ZONES

The very specific contexts of Ukraine, and the countries that have taken in refugees, bring numerous technical challenges for aid organisations who are more used to working in rural areas in developing countries. The last time aid was delivered in contexts similar to Ukraine was in the Balkans and Chechnya (and, in terms of the urban question, in Syrian cities). There was very little past experience, particularly concerning how Ukrainian society functions, to help establish the most appropriate operational methods and many humanitarian organisations had to revise their practices.

Despite the efforts that have been made in recent years, the traditional humanitarian aid system continues to have difficulty working in urban contexts where needs of a collective nature, such as electricity, water, heating and telecommunications, are just as significant as individual needs (food, hygiene, etc.). NGOs who had run canteen programmes for elderly people during the war in the Balkans or in the Caucasus, such as ACF or PUI, or who had used these methods in response to social crises in their own countries (such as World Kitchen), very quickly put them into practice in the Ukrainian context, working with local restaurants. As a result, canteen

systems were set up in many cities in Ukraine, as were delivery systems like 'Deliveroo' to bring meals to elderly people who were unable to move. Contracts were established and supply lines were created with private restaurants. In these contexts, both the strengths and weaknesses of the 'cash transfer' concept were apparent. In many parts of the country, meeting basic needs involved complex and shifting equations between what could and should be done with cash (unconditional cash transfers) and what had to take the form of in-kind aid. National cash transfer systems (Diya, Ipo-Pamaga) were under-used by aid actors in Ukraine who set up their own mechanisms, leading to considerable transaction costs (according to interviews with members of the Cash Working Group, it cost hundreds of thousands of euros to set up systems like 'RedRose'). Due to these parallel systems, after six months, there was a complex process to harmonise the sector and find ways for the national systems and those set up by the international aid sector to converge. As for in-kind donations, it is important to point out that these are very useful when they are related to clear requests (for example, lists of equipment and medicines validated by the health services). On the other hand, sending too many very generous but inappropriate donations (obsolete biomedical equipment, out of date medicines, etc.) leads to stock congestion and high



destruction costs. There have nevertheless been original experiments with in-kind aid that met clearly identified needs. For example, diaspora NGOs managed to respond to requests for hearses from municipal authorities in heavily bombed areas where the morgues have been partially destroyed and who need to transport a growing number of bodies.



A significant number of meetings, groups and task teams were gradually set up, usually via videoconference, unfortunately with Ukrainian government actors and civil society organisations at a great distance. As is often the case, there is still very little ‘area-based coordination’: local, inter-sector coordination, which is linked to municipal mechanisms, and integrated into them as early as possible.



PROTECTION AND COORDINATION CHALLENGES

The war in Ukraine and the displacement that it has caused has led to numerous protection problems: violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), sexual exploitation of women and children during the exodus and settlement in neighbouring countries, psychosocial problems due to fear, the loss of loved ones, exile, etc.

Many humanitarian agencies tried to meet these protection challenges, but the international community is still faced with major violations of IHL in the context of an international armed conflict, with attacks against civilian areas, urban warfare practices with the bombing of entire areas (Mariupol), massacres such as Bucha, the mistreatment of prisoners, the systematic destruction of critical infrastructure that is essential to civilian lives, etc. In this difficult context where information is very easily manipulated, there needs to be total support for the ICRC, particularly as it is caught between the distress of the Ukrainians and Russian intransigence. Given the risks of human trafficking and gender-based violence, many organisations, such as UNICEF, HCR and numerous NGOs, particularly national ones (Right to Protect) have been very active both in Ukraine and in neighbouring countries. It has also been crucial to restore the administrative identity of those who



have lost everything in the war. Municipal authorities, NGOs like DRC and Ukrainian human rights associations have done a great deal to help people with procedures to recuperate the official documents that they need to have access to services and aid.

Finally, coordination – which is supposed to save lives and livelihoods – proved to be relatively complicated with, on the one hand, the different national and local authorities, and the multitude of volunteer groups, and on the other, UN agencies, NGOs and donors.

Significant effort was made to establish a regular coordination system, with

clusters, led by OCHA. A significant number of meetings, groups and task teams were gradually set up, usually via videoconference, unfortunately with Ukrainian government actors and civil society organisations at a great distance. As is often the case, there is still very little 'area-based coordination': local, inter-sector coordination, which is linked to municipal mechanisms, and integrated into them as early as possible. This is the only way to achieve the systemic agility that is essential in this complex context where there is a combination of predictable events (military operations in the East and South, energy-related risks with the arrival of winter, etc.) and major uncertainty (where the fi-



Weaving camouflage nets in a volunteer center in Lviv © Groupe URD



ghting will take place, what areas will be bombed, etc.). The most responsive and effective way to adapt aid to sudden changes is to implement concerted, local and multi-sectoral analysis and decision-making.



It is very unlikely that the aid sector will emerge unscathed from this war: its main operational principles (such as neutrality) will need to be re-examined; not to abandon them, but to improve the way they are used.



B Y WAY OF CONCLUSION...

It is very unlikely that the aid sector will emerge unscathed from this war: its main operational principles (such as neutrality) will need to be re-examined; not to abandon them, but to improve the way they are used. They need to be analysed from an 'operational' point of view while taking into account the 'butterfly effects' that exist in our increasingly 'connected' world where information can be manipulated. Discussions about 'localisation' continue to be focused on national NGOs who 'resemble actors from the Global North'. They should increasingly include informal actors, unstructured volunteer groups, local state bodies⁵, private actors, diaspora networks, etc. To do this, the sector will need to revise the procedures that prevent it from opening up to what is happening 'outside the system'. There is a need for greater acceptance and understanding of the different types of action that exist in crisis contexts⁶.

Another point that the analysis has highlighted is that the humanitarian sector – in the same way as modern

5 - See Courraud M., Dorronsoro G., Quesnay A., « Quelle stratégie pour l'aide civile en Ukraine ? », *Études de l'Ifri*, Ifri, June 2022 (<https://www.ifri.org/fr/publications/etudes-de-lifri/strategie-laide-civile-ukraine>).

6 - See the following three reports: Grünewald F., 'Real-time evaluation of the response to Storm Alex in the Alpes-Maritimes region in France', January 2021 (https://www.urd.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Rapport-ETR2_Roya_-2021_FINAL.pdf); Grünewald F. et al., « Real-time evaluation after the explosion in Beirut, 2020 », September 2020 (https://www.urd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/ETRpostblastBeyrouth_ANG.pdf) and Grünewald F. et al., 'Urgence Beyrouth' Collective Study (https://www.urd.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Key-messages-jointstudyBeirut_-2022_final_ANG1.pdf).



western armies – no longer knows how to take action in high-intensity urban conflict contexts. The sector has also (re)discovered so-called 'hybrid' conflicts, where there are multiple angles and methods of engagement, with specific humanitarian impacts. Much of the research that has been carried out in the last twenty years has focused on asymmetrical conflicts in arid environments in the context of fragile, or even contested states. Many of the lessons from the wars in Bosnia and Chechnya in the 1990s, including those related to managing cold winters, had been forgotten and are only now being rediscovered. A new page is being turned regarding research into conflicts and humanitarian practices, legal norms and technical standards. We will need to be creative, open-minded and curious in the face of these challenges, and 'the violence that is coming'⁷. ❖

François Grünewald

*Directeur veille et prospective
du Groupe URD*

References of the introduction:

'Real-time Evaluation of the Humanitarian Response in Ukraine', Groupe URD, July-August 2022 (https://www.urd.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Ukraine_RTEReport_GroupeURD_ENG.pdf).

'Key messages for the delivery of aid in Ukraine', 2022 (<https://www.urd.org/en/publication/key-messages-for-the-delivery-of-aid-in-ukraine/>)

Video « Ukraine : solidarité, résistance, espoir » (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXwwKdJPZJg&t=4s>).

7 - As in the prophetic title of the book on modern warfare by *Éric de La Maisonnette*, *La violence qui vient*, Arléa, 1997.




bibliography


Quality of aid

QUALITY AND LOCAL ACTORS


How can we ensure that actors from the 'Global South' have access to international quality standards without changing them into clones of international NGOs? What should our approach to quality and accountability be in formal and informal partnerships with local actors? How should alternative visions of quality be taken into account and recognised within a structured and standardised conventional aid system?

 **"Localisation and local humanitarian action"**, Humanitarian Exchange, N°79, HPN, ODI, May 2021.

The theme of this edition is localisation and local humanitarian action which became a priority under the Grand Bargain (2016). Yet progress has been slow and major gaps remain between the rhetoric around humanitarian partnerships, funding and coordination and practices on the ground. https://odihpn.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/HE-79_Localisation_WEB-1.pdf

 **Acteurs locaux et conventionnels de la solidarité internationale : quelles articulations, quelles inspirations ?**, Valérie Léon, Groupe URD, 2022.

Though the sector has not sufficiently changed since the Grand Bargain in 2016, there have been reforms, a number of interesting experiments are taking place, and sources of inspiration do exist. This review of practices presents an overview of the situation, with concrete examples and possible routes towards a new paradigm. https://www.urd.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Rapport-Localisation-aide_2022_FR.pdf


 **The State of Local Humanitarian Leadership**, Janice Ian Manlutac, Oxfam, 2022.

From May 2021 to January 2022, Oxfam, in partnership with Sejar Indonesia, the Tamdeen Youth Foundation in Yemen, and the Palestinian Agricultural Development Association (PARC) in Palestine, convened a total of 10 learning series



through online convenings on local humanitarian leadership (LHL). Approximately 450 people participated, of whom 60% were from local and national NGOs representing approximately 30 countries. This document offers a snapshot report on the state of LHL across the four regions based on discussions, insights, and materials shared by the resource persons and audience members who participated in the series.

<https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/the-state-of-local-humanitarian-leadership-a-learning-report-on-a-series-of-lhl-621376/>

 ***Is “decolonized aid” an oxymoron?***, *Rethinking Humanitarianism Podcast*, *The New Humanitarian*, 2022.

In this episode of *Rethinking Humanitarianism*, host Heba Aly discusses tensions related to the decolonisation of aid with one of the leaders of the movement, Degan Ali, executive director of Adeso. There are two very different schools of thoughts on decolonising aid within the humanitarian community. Some define decolonisation as a call to reform an otherwise worthy endeavour. Others see it as a call to end aid altogether. Are these two approaches mutually exclusive, or can they co-exist? Is decolonised aid even achievable within our current global governance system?

<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/podcast/2022/10/19/Degan-Ali-decolonising-aid>

 ***The damage aid workers can do – with just their words***, Tammam Aloudat, *The National*, 2022.

This article is about “humanitarian language”. It shows how the language and psychology of the aid sector has divided the world into “saviours” and ‘beneficiaries’. The author invites humanitarian actors to find a new language, and a world view and tools to create the words to talk about the poor, the sick and crisis survivors as owners of their fate, rather than as an inconvenience that has to be overcome in the grand humanitarian narrative.

<https://www.thenationalnews.com/opinion/comment/the-damage-aid-workers-can-do-with-just-their-words-1.1190907>



QUALITY AND ENVIRONMENT


What does quality mean in relation to environmental degradation and climate change? How can the concepts of quality and accountability be redefined in relation to these issues? How can we make sure that international norms and standards are not an obstacle to taking environmental issues into account? To what extent can quality help to change attitudes and practices in relation to these issues?

 **Greening the System: A Vision for a Green Humanitarian Future**, Humanitarian Advisory Group, GLOW, PIANGO, 2022.

Humanitarian actors are faced with the accelerating imperative to improve the environmental and closely related social impact of their activities. While this is a global problem, the Asia-Pacific region presents its own specific obstacles to collectively greening humanitarian action. This paper, developed by NGOs based in the Asia and Pacific regions, presents their vision for a green humanitarian system. It strives to elevate discussion and promote fresh thinking from within the sector, based on evidence and grounded in the lived experience of people and communities participating in and directly impacted by humanitarian action. <https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/HAG-HH2-GTS-Vision-Paper.pdf>


 **Principles for locally-led adaptation: A call to action**, Marek Soanes and al., Issue paper, IIED, 2021.

This paper outlines more than five years of action research, including collaborative research and dialogue between IIED, WRI and more than 50 adaptation stakeholders in support of the Global Commission on Adaptation's Locally Led Adaptation Track. It details the core concepts of locally led adaptation; discusses the problems in business as usual and the solutions offered by business unusual; and proposes eight principles to help stakeholders build an adaptation ecosystem that empowers local actors on the frontline of climate change to lead more adaptation solutions. It closes with an open invitation to participate in a complimentary learning journey. <https://pubs.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2021-01/10211IIED.pdf>

 **No Plan B: The Importance of Environmental Considerations in Humanitarian Contexts, An analysis of Tools, Policies, and Commitments of DEC Members**, A. Johnson, I. Mele, F. Merola, K. Plewa, DEC, LSE, 2020.



Humanitarians understand the importance and urgency of the environmental agenda, and they have a clear desire to incorporate environmental considerations into their work. However, they are hindered in their endeavours by multiple challenges. This study examines these challenges, as well as key opportunities for change and development. <https://www.dec.org.uk/article/report-the-importance-of-environmental-considerations-in-humanitarian-contexts>

 **Environment and Humanitarian Action: Increasing Effectiveness, Sustainability and Accountability**, Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit, ProAct network, Groupe URD, 2014.


This study reviews the current state of integration of environmental considerations in humanitarian action and outlines a way forward on how environment should be consistently taken into account at all phases of humanitarian programming, leading towards improved effectiveness, accountability and sustainability of humanitarian action. https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/EHA%20Study%20webfinal_1.pdf

QUALITY AND AFFECTED PEOPLE


How can we finally give affected people a significant role in the assistance that they receive? How do we ensure that this aid remains appropriate and agile in relation to people's needs and expectations and changes to the context? How do we ensure that quality does not view affected people simply as passive beneficiaries but includes them as genuine actors of the response? How can we move from a 'donor' vision of quality to a vision that genuinely takes beneficiaries' feedback into account?

 **Humanitarian Accountability Report 2022**, CHS Alliance, 2022.


The *Humanitarian Accountability Report (HAR) 2022* draws on seven years of accountability data analysis, system-wide studies and expert thought. The report is an evidence-based overview of the current state of accountability in the aid system, providing a critical opportunity to see the trends, patterns, weaknesses and strengths. It aims to answer the question – is accountability to people affected by crisis really a non-negotiable for the aid system. <https://www.chsalliance.org/har2022/>

-  **The State of the Humanitarian System 2022 (SOHS)**, A. Obrecht, S. Swithern, J. Doherty, Alnap, 2022.

The State of the Humanitarian System 2022 looks at the period from January 2018 to December 2021, as well as drawing comparisons with our previous editions to take a 15-year long view. It assesses the size, shape and performance of the humanitarian system against key criteria over time. It is independent and based on evidence from frontline practitioners, crisis-affected populations, academics, policy-makers and donors. <https://www.alnap.org/help-library/2022-the-state-of-the-humanitarian-system-sohs-%E2%80%93-full-report-0>

-  **People-Driven Response: Power and Participation in Humanitarian Action**, Jeremy Konyndyk, Rose Worden, CGD Policy Paper 155, Center for Global Development, 2019.


The notion that humanitarian response should center on the people it serves, rather than the aid agencies serving them, has been repeatedly codified in humanitarian commitments as far back as the early 1990s. Yet the mainstream humanitarian system has struggled to translate these commitments into practice. This paper proposes a set of mutually reinforcing recommendations centered around three imperatives: enshrining the influence of aid recipients at all levels of aid decision-making; developing independent channels for soliciting the priorities and perspectives of crisis-affected people; and institutionalizing a set of enabling changes to humanitarian operational and personnel practices. <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/people-driven-response.pdf>

-  **Accountability to affected people: Stuck in the weeds**, Meg Sattler, Humanitarian Horizons Practice Paper Series, Humanitarian Advisory Group, 2021.

It would be hard pressed to find a topic more pervasive in global humanitarian speak than accountability to affected people (AAP), its unofficial motto 'putting people at the centre' the catch-cry of almost every humanitarian reform process, discussion and publication. This practice paper provides a summary of the evaluations and reviews that have concluded that AAP is not having its intended impact. It goes on to provide possible explanations for this failure with a focus on the blockages between policy, practice and outcome, and concludes by proposing six ways to think about improved outcome-focused AAP.

https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/HH_Practice-Paper-8_AAP_draft7.pdf




 **Linking Constituent Engagement and Adaptive Management: Lessons from practitioners**, Stephanie Buell, Megan Campbell, Jamie Pett, Working Paper 595, ODI, 2020.

Constituent engagement and adaptive management are both important tools for implementing responsive and effective development programmes. This paper explores five key elements for ensuring that constituent engagement and adaptive management are effectively linked within a programme: strong internal systems and external channels; skilled staff that value engagement and adaptation; decision-maker champions; clear points for reflection and action; and a meaningful role for constituents. <https://odi.org/en/publications/linking-constituent-engagement-and-adaptive-management-lessons-from-practitioners/>

QUALITY AND STANDARDS

To what extent has the multiplication of quality initiatives since the 1990s led to the over-standardisation of the aid sector? How can we ensure that the notions of quality and accountability do not only concern donor compliance? How can we give meaning back to quality and accountability, and ensure that the focus is affected people and local actors?

 « **La restructuration sans fin du monde humanitaire : une recherche inadaptée de la performance ?** », Perrine Laissus-Benoist, *Alternatives Humanitaires*, N°9, 2018.

With the professionalisation of the humanitarian sector, the regular calls for its reorganisation have often taken the form of reformatting based on neoliberal ideology. According to the author, the objective of increased performance is not in keeping with the complexity of humanitarian action and is detrimental to the people concerned. <https://www.alternatives-humanitaires.org/fr/2018/11/13/la-restructuration-sans-fin-du-monde-humanitaire-une-recherche-inadaptee-de-la-performance/>

 **A new Solferino moment for humanitarians**, Hugo Slim, *Humanitarian Law & Policy*, 2022.

This year marks the 160th anniversary of the publication of Henri Dunant's classic text, 'A Memory of Solferino', in 1862. Dunant's powerful book inspired



bibliography

the founding of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the First Geneva Convention of 1864. In this post, Hugo Slim, Senior Research Fellow at the University of Oxford, reflects on changes in warfare and humanitarian aid since Dunant's legacy and makes three calls to action of his own. <https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2022/02/10/new-solferino-moment-humanitarians/>



« **Standards – Friends or foes of agility?** », Michael Carrier, *Humanitaires en mouvement*, N°20, Groupe URD, 2019.

There is more and more talk of 'agility' (or 'adaptive management') with regard to meeting people's needs in increasingly complex and volatile contexts. This notion raises questions about the added value of humanitarian and development standards: do existing standards help, or on the contrary, limit our ability to 'be agile' and adapt operations when needs, contexts or resources change? <https://www.urd.org/en/review-hem/standards-friends-or-foes-of-agility/>



ONG et management fondé sur la qualité. Terre des hommes ou terre des normes ?, Justine Rosselet, Itinéraires, Études du développement, n°19, Institut Universitaire d'Études du Développement, 2003.

This study focuses on the adoption of quality standards by NGOs. It begins by analyzing the history of ISO standards and the assumptions behind them. It then shows what it means for an NGO to implement a quality management standard. Finally, the study asks two main questions: Does the management system of ISO standards ensure quality? Is this management model exportable? <https://studylibfr.com/doc/1857688/ong-et-management-fond%C3%A9-sur-la-qualit%C3%A9--terre-des-hommes>

QUALITY, HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND EQUITY


To what extent do humanitarian principles still provide relevant guidance for aid organisations? What are their limits and in what situations can they be called into question? To what extent can other emerging notions like equity help to overcome the limits of these principles? What is the relationship between humanitarian principles, equity and quality, and to what extent can these notions mutually reinforce each other?



Taking action, not sides: the benefits of humanitarian neutrality in war, Fiona Terry, *Humanitarian Law & Policy*, 2022.




Fiona Terry, head of the ICRC's Centre for Operational Research and Experience (CORE) explains her conversion from a neutrality sceptic to a genuine believer in the purpose and utility of retaining a neutral stance in war, based on first-hand experience. <https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2022/06/21/taking-action-not-sides-humanitarian-neutrality/>

 ***Principled humanitarian programming in Yemen: A “Prisoner’s Dilemma”?***, Marzia Montemurro, Karin Wendt, HERE-Geneva, 2021.

This report has aimed to develop an understanding of the challenges and decisions related to negotiations, access, and coordination that organisations pursue to uphold principled humanitarian action in Yemen. The research has hinged on two main tasks: 1) capturing how ECHO partner organisations in Yemen approach the humanitarian principles conceptually and practically; and 2) identifying the challenges/obstacles and enablers ECHO humanitarian partners face in providing principled humanitarian programming, and assessing to what extent it is possible to infer linkages between these challenges/obstacles, and a) their approach to the humanitarian principles; b) their access, presence, and perceived acceptance in Yemen; and c) the interface between their individual organisation's approach and a coordinated one within the wider humanitarian architecture.

https://here-geneva.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Principled-H-programming-in-Yemen_HERE-Geneva_2021-1.pdf

 ***Humanitarian resistance: Its ethical and operational importance,*** Hugo Slim, Network Paper 87, HPN, ODI, 2022.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the return of military dictatorship in Myanmar have reminded the world of the importance of humanitarian resistance. In both countries, civilian rescue and relief is being organised by resistance groups that are struggling for victory and humanity in equal measure, and so simultaneously taking sides for human life and human freedom. They are not neutral but they are humanitarian. In many situations, resistance humanitarians are reaching people faster and better than orthodox humanitarians from neutral international agencies. This paper makes the case for humanitarian resistance as an essential, ethical and legal form of organised humanitarianism. Cet article défend l'idée que la résistance humanitaire est une forme essentielle, éthique et légale du mouvement humanitaire organisé.

https://odihpn.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Humanitarian-resistance_NP_web.pdf

Groupe URD (Urgence – Réhabilitation – Développement)

Founded in 1993, Groupe URD is an independent think tank that specialises in analysing practices and developing policies for the humanitarian sector. Our multi-disciplinary expertise, based on continual field visits to crisis and post-crisis contexts, provides us with insight into the functioning of the sector as a whole. We believe in sharing knowledge and collective learning, and we help aid actors to improve the quality of their programmes.

www.urd.org

Humanitarian Aid on the move - a bilingual review – aims to share the results of work on important issues currently facing the sector.

We regularly invite external contributors and provide links to other publications.

Further reading on certain topics and full articles by the authors can be found on the Groupe URD website:

www.urd.org/en/review-hem/

Produced within the Project « Apprendre et innover face aux crises - Phase 2 » with support from:



Director : Véronique de Geoffroy
Editorial board : Véronique de Geoffroy, Marie Faou, Valérie Léon
Editorial secretary : Pierre Brunet
Translation: Etienne Sutherland

Printed by : Transcopy (Courthézon)
Design by : foli-o

ISSN : 2261-7124
Legal deposit : september 2012



Humanitarian ^{N°24} aid on the move

SUIVEZ-NOUS SUR



Groupe URD

La Fontaine des Marins
26170 Plaisians – France
TEL: +33 (0)4 75 28 29 35

urd@urd.org

www.urd.org

Contacts

To propose an article and/or receive the electronic version, please contact Pierre Brunet
pbrunet@urd.org