

1. INTRODUCTION

The Liaison Agency (LA) is a coordination mechanism used by the Caritas confederation during major emergencies. The LA is carried out by a Caritas member organisation (MO) that takes on the role of coordination at the request of, and on behalf of, Caritas Internationalis (CI¹).

In 2000, CI began a process of review of its approaches to responding to emergencies and has since produced new guidelines and new mechanisms. This assessment of the LA model is part of the overall review process. The changing context within which Caritas members are working, the introduction of new mechanisms which affect the functioning and role of the LA and, not least, its contended status, led CI to commission an independent, separate review of the LA mechanism. This document presents the finding of the review of the LA model.

The purpose is “to review the current Caritas Internationalis Liaison Agency model and make clear recommendations to improve it or to recommend a better structure which might be used in CI’s response to major emergencies”. The Terms of Reference (ToR) is attached as Annex I. An external team from the consultancy company AguaConsult was selected to carry out the review by CI in October 2003, following a tendering and interview process.

The report is organised in the following way: sections 2 and 3 provide a description of the review methodology and a background history of the LA model. Sections 4 and 5 describe the LA objectives and activities. Sections 6-10 analyse the effectiveness of the mechanism. The final sections summarise principal findings and present recommendations.

2. METHODOLOGY

The main part of the review was conducted between November 2003 and February 2004. The team began the work with an extensive review of all available and relevant internal CI documentation, such as policy documents, previous evaluations, meeting minutes, reports and disaster response guidelines as well as over thirty ToRs for LA agreements and other related types of partnerships.

A Steering Committee of eight Caritas staff members from three regions (Asia, Africa and Europe) as well as CI in Rome was established by CI’s International Cooperation Department (ICD) to provide support, oversight and consultation for the review. The review was managed and facilitated by the ICD.

The primary method for obtaining views and feedback on the LA mechanism was semi-structured interviews. Some 80 people were interviewed, representing 17 Caritas member organisations as well as three external organisations³. Ten countries were visited by the team, of which six were represented by existing LA Caritas MOs or previous Las; other LAs were interviewed by telephone. Anecdotal evidence and preliminary inferences have been triangulated with the interviews and secondary documentation in order to optimise the accuracy and fair representation of the final conclusions.

A questionnaire was also sent to all Caritas members, with versions in English, Spanish and French. A limited number of responses (eleven) were received, of which four were from Northern and seven from Southern Caritas member organisations. A summary analysis of the responses is

¹ Caritas Internationalis (CI) is a global confederation of 162 Catholic organisations. Throughout this report, the term CI refers to the role played by the Head Office in Rome as representatives of the Confederation, specifically the General Secretariat and the International Cooperation Department

³ See Annex X for a complete list of interviewees

included in Annex VIII. Additionally, the ICD assisted in the identification of key informants who were interviewed by telephone.

Three countries were selected as case studies⁴. The selection of El Salvador, India and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was made in Rome following consultation with members of the International Cooperation Committee for Emergencies (ICC) and the review team. The principal criteria for selection of these countries was their experience of an LA, including as wide a range of regions as possible within time and budget constraints, availability of key staff and logistical accessibility. A separate report on each country was produced and, along with other sources, forms the basis of the report's findings. The country case study reports are included in Annexes III, IV and V. Desk-based case studies are outlined in Annex VI.

The review team was committed to a process that was participative and consultative. In each of the three field trips, the team held a feedback session with key Caritas staff to discuss the principal findings and potential recommendations. This was done to check for accuracy and as part of a consultative methodology, optimising the feasibility of any recommendations. Throughout the review monthly progress reports were sent to the Steering Committee. Following the completion of field trips and interviews, the preliminary findings and recommendations were drafted in an Aide Mémoire and distributed to six regional or MO representatives for discussion in London. The discussion meeting, held prior to the writing and distribution of the draft report, enabled the review team to "test" and discuss its draft recommendations, maximising the opportunities for an exchange of ideas and was designed to increase the utility of the review.

A draft report was subsequently distributed and discussed with the ICC in Rome, prior to a final edit and completion in mid March 2004.

3. THE HISTORY OF THE LIAISON AGENCY MECHANISM

3.1 *Developing the Role:*

An early version of the Liaison Agency was tried in CHAD in the early 1970s, where weak coordination and the need for a common strategy led Caritas Switzerland to take on a coordination role. It was called, briefly, a Lead Agency, soon modified to LA and was viewed by the Swiss as a service on behalf of CI. The incoming CI Secretary General, who was also from Caritas Switzerland, brought the idea to Rome during the 1980s. The intended LA role was essentially:

- As a platform for information exchange
- For coordination of projects and inputs
- For international representation.

In 1984 the LA mechanism was formally approved by CI's Executive Committee. To be activated it had to be appointed by the local Caritas, the Secretary General (SG) and the Emergency Aid Commission (EAC). It was intended only for "exceptional emergency situations"⁵ with a mandate to:

- Coordinate financing
- Permit more efficient work on all levels
- Strengthen structures in developing countries

The LA was to provide information on progress, with the partner having overall responsibility and producing reports.

⁴ It was originally intended to visit Caritas Yugoslavia; however the flight costs were considered prohibitive and the interviews were therefore carried out by telephone

⁵ *History of CI Liaison Agency establishment* CI, CI, undated