

Good Humanitarian Donorship: reviewing progress

A study by the Humanitarian Policy Group, ODI

Background and Rationale

In 2003, the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative was launched at an international meeting in Stockholm, Sweden. The initiative established the distinctiveness of the humanitarian agenda, as a subset of aid policy in donor governments. Donors agreed on a set of shared, commonly agreed objectives for, and a definition of, humanitarian action, as well as a set of general principles and good practice for good donorship, including a principle to respect and promote international humanitarian law, refugee law and human rights; a commitment to allocate funding in proportion to needs; and a commitment to strive to ensure predictable and flexible funding.

The meeting involved representatives of donor governments, UN agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and other organisations involved in humanitarian action. It concluded with an Implementation Plan which set out five initial activities. An Implementation Group was subsequently established to provide guidance and oversight on the implementation of the core activities.

The current challenge is for donor governments and organisations, with the assistance of the international humanitarian partner community, to translate the political commitments and the principles of humanitarian action into norms in donor behaviour.

Throughout the evolution of the good humanitarian donorship initiative and at its key events, HPG has played an active role in engaging with and observing the process. The initiative itself and its main conclusions were influenced significantly by the findings from a series of recent studies, including the Humanitarian Financing Working Group and a recent HPG report which examined the changing role of official donors in humanitarian action.¹ Recognising that the initiative is one of the more significant international policy agendas in the humanitarian sector over the last decade, HPG proposes to continue to contribute to efforts to maintain a research agenda and support a critical dialogue between all stakeholders in the good donorship initiative.

The project

The objectives to guide HPG's work in this area over the coming year are two-fold. First the study will attempt to explore and address the challenges of translating the political commitment of good humanitarian donorship into policy and practice. In addressing this issue, the work will seek to identify those areas where there has been progress in developing mechanisms to translate humanitarian principles into good practice. Recent work on needs assessment methodologies and criteria for assessing need is one area where progress towards realizing the principle of impartiality is underway. Other issues, such as the advantages and disadvantages of different financing instruments and

¹ Joanna Macrae et al., *Uncertain Power: The Changing Role of Official Donors in Humanitarian Action*, HPG Report 12 (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2002). James Darcy and Charles-Antoine Hofmann, *According to need? Needs assessment and decision-making in the humanitarian sector*, HPG Report 15 (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2003)

contractual arrangements between donor and recipient agencies, are yet to be fully explored. HPG's work will aim to identify and address some of these challenges.

Second, the work will aim to keep the agenda of good humanitarian donorship global. In doing this HPG will engage with a wide range of stakeholders, including non-OECD DAC countries, the new EU Member states, and a wide range of Non Government Organisations. The objective of keeping the agenda global will translate in both the nature of enquiry for the research agenda and our communications strategy.

The study will enable HPG to build upon its previous contribution to this initiative and its established expertise in this area. It will aim to ensure that interested stakeholders are informed of the progress and any major developments in the initiative's activities, as well as identify areas for future action. It will also enable the Group to respond effectively to an ongoing demand for independent analysis.

The project will involve three key outputs:

1. A Briefing paper to be delivered in advance of the GHD follow-up meeting Ottawa, Canada;
2. A series of communication briefings post-Ottawa for key stakeholder dissemination and dialogue; and,
3. A special GHD edition of the Humanitarian Practice Network's *Humanitarian Exchange* publication in early 2005.

1. Briefing Paper: "From Stockholm to Ottawa: Mapping progress and identifying issues and challenges"

Over the course of a 6-month period, the study will involve analysis and review of relevant documentary materials, as well as telephone and face-to-face interviews to seek the views and experiences of members of the Implementation Group and other key stakeholders, including representatives of donor governments, staff of the OECD-DAC, UN agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, NGOs and other organisations, including those involved in the follow-up activities related to the findings from the Humanitarian Financing Working Group studies.

The Briefing paper will aim to capture the following:

- Background and agreement of GHD principles and good practice in Stockholm, June 2003;
- The challenges of shifting from political commitments to establishing policy frameworks and good practice in the field;
- Key multilateral and bilateral initiatives.
- Significant policy and operational markers.
- Whether and how partner agencies have engaged with the GHD initiative and sought to utilize the principles;
- A set of key questions for policymakers in the lead up to Ottawa; and
- Identification of areas of work for future implementation

Briefing post-Ottawa

A series of communication briefings post the follow-up meeting in Ottawa are planned. These may be undertaken in conjunction with NGO consortia and UN agencies. The purpose would be to highlight the key conclusions from Ottawa, disseminate relevant materials and promote dialogue and debate. It is proposed that briefings be held in London, Brussels, New York, Washington and Canberra with the option for additional dissemination (possibly Nairobi) as necessary.

Humanitarian Exchange

The Humanitarian Practice Network is a unique forum. With an estimated readership of over 10,000 in 80 countries, and across 400 organisations it has significant reach in the humanitarian community. It is designed for the purposes of sharing and disseminating information, ideas, analysis and experience. As the challenges for the good humanitarian donorship initiative are not only policy-based and operational ones, but also communications related, commissioning a 'GHD special' of Humanitarian Exchange to encourage a wide and shared understanding of the initiative and its activities seems appropriate. To be published in early 2005, contributions will be sought from a wide-range of stakeholders, including field practitioners in Burundi and DRC, an official of the OECD DAC, a representative of PAGER – the forum for operational Canadian humanitarian agencies, a representative from a new EU Member state.

Collaboration

The Centre on International Cooperation (CIC) in New York will take on the US-policy and practice aspects piece of this research; assist in producing the Briefing Paper for Ottawa; and post-Ottawa briefings. CIC were closely involved in HPG's work on the changing role of official donors in humanitarian action, and also bring an important body of research and a familiarity with US donor policy, multilateralism and US NGO debates.

Communications strategy

The primary audience for this project are the stakeholders of the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative, including representatives of donor governments, UN agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, NGOs and other organisations including those involved in the Humanitarian Financing Working Group studies, and related follow-up activities.

The findings and outputs are also likely to be of interest and relevance to other political and development actors, including parliamentarians and officials from development aid agencies and officials of the OCED-DAC.

The major output of the project, the HPG Briefing Paper, will be released in early October 2004, in time for dissemination prior to the follow-up meeting in Ottawa, Canada.

The options for linking dissemination and discussion of this work with HPG's study on emerging donors will also be explored.