

HPG Research Briefing

From Stockholm to Ottawa

A progress review of the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative

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As financiers and increasingly as strategic actors in their own right, official donor governments exert a significant influence over the outcome of humanitarian action. Yet until a year ago, there was no consensus regarding how donor governments could and should use their influence and harmonise their procedures to improve humanitarian response. Donor policy and approaches to decision-making and resource allocation were criticised for being weakly articulated, *ad hoc* and uncoordinated. Driven by political interests rather than according to need, funding allocations were often inequitable, unpredictable and untimely in responding to crises. The humanitarian activities of donors were weakly linked into mainstream development administrations, and remained outside formal inter-governmental donor processes. Overall, there were weak account-

ability mechanisms and transparency in relation to donor action.

In June 2003, donor governments met in Stockholm to address these concerns. There, donors identified what constitutes 'good donorship' in the humanitarian sector, and committed to a series of Principles and Good Practice measures. A follow-up meeting in Ottawa in October 2004 provides an opportunity to reflect and take stock of progress on these commitments. This briefing paper provides an overview of what has become known as the 'Good Humanitarian Donorship' (GHD) initiative. It is based on interviews with representatives of donor governments and stakeholders, as well as documentation emerging from the process. It highlights the main accomplishments to date, and the challenges donor governments have faced in advancing the initiative.

About HPG

The Humanitarian Policy Group at the Overseas Development Institute is dedicated to improving humanitarian policy and practice. It conducts independent research, provides specialist advice and promotes informed debate.



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Stockholm: establishing the goals of GHD

In June 2003, 16 OECD-Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donor governments gathered at an unprecedented meeting in Stockholm. The meeting established the foundations for good donorship in the humanitarian arena. Donor governments committed to a common set of objectives for humanitarian action, a definition of humanitarian action for further development by the OECD-DAC and a set of general principles for good donorship. They also agreed areas of good practice in humanitarian response. The meeting established an Implementation Plan, and an Implementation Group (IG) to oversee the changes was formed in Geneva.

Box 1: GHD Implementation Plan

1. Donors to identify at least one crisis subject to a Consolidated Appeal (CAP) to which the Principles and Good Practice will be applied.
2. Donors to invite the OECD-DAC to consider ways to strengthen the peer review process to include humanitarian action.
3. Donors to explore the possibility of harmonising the reporting requirements and management demands placed on implementing humanitarian organisations.
4. Donors (with the UN and OECD-DAC) to agree a comprehensive common definition of official humanitarian assistance (OHA) for reporting and statistical purposes.
5. Donors to promote the wider use of the Principles and Good Practice, and to invite all interested donors to participate in the follow-up of the Implementation Plan.

The endorsement of GHD signalled political will to improve donor behaviour. GHD was presented as a voluntary initiative, which allowed the largest possible number of donors to commit to it. However, this also posed a challenge in ensuring progress in implementing it.

The initiative also arrived in the midst of a pronounced shift in the policy and operational context of humanitarian action. The post-9/11 security agenda, integrated responses to crises and increasing political drivers for interventionism have sharpened the debate over the meaning and efficacy of principled action in highly-contested settings. This lent a timeliness and urgency to the GHD initiative, while simultaneously making its advancement more difficult.

Starting from the same page: a shared definition of humanitarian action

A collective definition of humanitarian action has significant advantages. It draws boundaries around the nature of the action. It allows for the development of a common vocabulary, for a clearer articulation of humanitarian claims on resources, and for greater clarity for statistical and reporting purposes. By adopting the term humanitarian *action*, as opposed to *assistance*, donors invited an expanded agenda, allowing the inclusion of protection as a central element of the humanitarian project.

Donors committed to GHD	Other key stakeholders
Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, ECHO, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, US	UN humanitarian agencies, International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, non-governmental organisations involved in humanitarian response

Finding consensus on a definition was a significant achievement. However, usage of that definition has been limited. Two donor governments formally adopted the definition into new humanitarian policy statements. Other donors maintained that their policies sufficiently captured the definition, and some were concerned not to unravel legislation that had already established the parameters of humanitarian action. Very few agencies referred to the Stockholm definition in public policy documents.

Donors also agreed to ensure accuracy, timeliness and transparency in reporting on official humanitarian assistance (OHA), and to encourage the development of standardised formats for such reporting. Since what constitutes humanitarian aid was not clearly defined or consistently reported,¹ the OECD-DAC (guided by the IG sub-working group on definitions) was encouraged to develop a comprehensive common definition of OHA, and improve accountability, transparency and comparability.²

Box 2: Developing a common definition of humanitarian action (Implementation Point 4)

The sub-working group on definitions concluded that there is a need for improved DAC statistical reporting directives on ‘emergency and distress relief’ (the current statistical category). A broader category of ‘humanitarian action’ has been proposed to member states for consideration:

- *Objective:* The objectives of humanitarian action are to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and in the aftermath of emergencies.
- *Situation:* An emergency is a situation, recognised by the UN or the ICRC/IFRC, which results from man-made crises and/or natural disasters.
- *Alignment with IHL:* Humanitarian action should be guided by the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.
- *Beneficiaries and activities:* Humanitarian action includes the protection of civilians and those no longer taking part in hostilities, and the provision of food and water, sanitation and health services and other items of assistance, undertaken for the benefit of affected people and to facilitate the return to normal lives and livelihoods. This also includes support for disaster preparedness.

In developing the definition, the following issues need to be considered.

GHD requires a definition that focuses on the nature of the need, not on the crisis ‘phase’. The proposed definition

Key findings of the research

The GHD initiative has encouraged a new dialogue and has increased awareness about the roles and responsibilities of official donors. It represents a tool of advocacy for humanitarian administrators, both in relation to their governments and the public, on the distinctiveness of humanitarian aid as a special form of official aid. It has established a normative standard to which donors can be held to account. As such, it is welcomed by the majority of stakeholders as a positive endeavour.

Yet the review found variable progress in implementing the Principles and Good Practice and the Implementation Plan. It also found that awareness and appreciation of specific goals, objectives and progress is limited. Specific findings of the review include:

- Communication on the part of donor governments and advocacy on the part of stakeholders have been limited.
- Attempts by donor governments to operationalise GHD commitments in humanitarian policy and practice have been uneven, and the voluntary nature of the initiative has resulted in differences in priorities and in approaches to implementation. Coordination of donor policy remains elusive.
- Critically, there remains a lack of agreement within and between donors and other stakeholders about how donor governments should interpret and apply humanitarian principles. This is the area where there is least consensus, and where least progress has been made.
- There has been significant progress in the implementation

of a donor peer review process, and on mapping a definition of humanitarian action. This has been driven via the OECD-DAC mechanisms.

- The scope of change and the amount of work that will be required by stakeholders, and the collective nature of the endeavour, were underestimated in Stockholm. To ensure that GHD results in good humanitarian *outcomes*, the elements of good partnership, as well as good donorship, need to be considered.
- Means to measure progress on GHD, which are vital to ownership, accountability and transparency, remain underdeveloped.

GHD is an important and ambitious agenda, and timeframes for implementation are necessarily long-term. However, some of the challenges to implementation concern the *process* itself, and could be addressed in the immediate term. These include:

- Increased communication at all levels, and to all stakeholders, including a clearer articulation of objectives, expected outcomes and indicators to measure and demonstrate progress.
- Increased ownership and leadership of the initiative within governments, including clearer action plans towards achieving the goals established in Stockholm, and appropriate operational guidance to field staff.
- A realistic appraisal of the resources involved in implementation.

stresses the time-bound nature of humanitarian operations ('during and in the aftermath of emergencies'), as opposed to the nature of the need and the response (urgent measures required to save lives or relieve suffering). This neglects the fact that ongoing or recurrent humanitarian interventions will often be needed simultaneously with recovery and development activities. It also fails to delineate within any given sector between 'humanitarian' activities and sectoral activities that are geared more towards social recovery and rehabilitation. Such difficulties led some interviewees to suggest that humanitarian principles must form the core of the definition.

Humanitarian action includes both assistance and protection; the sphere of protection within humanitarian action needs clear articulation. It remains weakly explored and articulated, particularly in terms of the linkages to wider political processes. The actions that need to be distinguished and treated as OHA require serious consideration. Dialogue between donor governments and their implementing partners is needed to ensure consensus on the nature of protection-related activities, and clear lines of responsibility in humanitarian response.

Humanitarian action and transitional assistance should remain distinct. Although the wording of the definition does not explicitly include transition activities, the proposed breakdown for reporting purposes includes 'reconstruction', defined as 'transitional assistance in the aftermath of crises or during protracted crises'. The review found that this conflation goes against the Stockholm consensus that humanitarian

assistance is a distinctive form of aid. Transitional assistance is concerned primarily with peace- and state-building objectives.³ Accordingly, it involves a much wider range of actors, aid instruments and partners than are traditionally associated with humanitarian operations. Attaching this far broader remit to humanitarian action creates difficulties for those humanitarian actors who operate outside political structures on principle, and makes it difficult to draw a line around humanitarian programming within sectors. Furthermore, it may obfuscate the need for more flexible, substantial and sustained forms of funding for transitions and protracted crises.

The definitional sub-working group, with the OECD-DAC, represents an important opportunity to inform the understanding of precisely what constitutes official humanitarian aid, and to ensure that the definition reflects the commitments made to GHD.

Formalising and communicating GHD commitments

The review found that very few donor governments had developed specific action plans or frameworks to implement their GHD commitments. Thirteen donors had drafted, or were drafting, new or revised humanitarian policy frameworks. However, only three had specific legislation relating to humanitarian action. Some donors had institutionalised humanitarian principles into their policy statements, though many of these moves predate Stockholm and therefore do not reflect the commitments made to GHD. There were few examples of high-level political sponsorship of GHD. One notable exception is the UK Foreign Secretary's

declaration of the British government's commitment to GHD to improve the effectiveness of the international humanitarian system, made in September 2004 in relation to the situation in Darfur.⁴

Overall, the review found that dialogue with implementing partners at the domestic level has been limited. Whilst GHD is a donor initiative, its implementation is dependent on the willingness and capacity of implementing partners. This includes enhancing the capacity for needs analysis; improving the capacity to collect baseline data; developing effective prioritisation procedures; the timely reporting of funding and activities to OCHA's Financial Tracking System (FTS); undertaking impact assessments; providing results-based information for reporting procedures; and implementing the findings from evaluations. The collective nature of the GHD endeavour, and the work required by all actors to advance the initiative, seems to have been underestimated. In turn, advocacy on the part of stakeholders – holding donors to account for their commitments – has been limited. One commentator noted that, whilst agencies have effective vehicles for lobbying on specific crises, they have yet to advocate effectively on thematic issues or on issues of humanitarian policy.

GHD principles and policy⁵

It was in the understanding and operationalising of humanitarian principles that the review found least progress towards interpreting and implementing the goals of GHD. In Stockholm, donor governments agreed that humanitarian action should be guided by the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. They also reaffirmed a commitment to respect and promote international humanitarian law, refugee law and human rights.

The review undertook to ascertain two main issues in relation to humanitarian principles: first, how donors interpret the GHD principles in relation to their own actions; and second, the degree to which donors had operationalised their commitments to the principles in domestic law, official policy or humanitarian programming.

Donors were generally clearest and most confident about the principle of *impartiality*, meaning 'the implementation of actions solely on the basis of need, without any discrimination between or within affected populations'.⁶ Many donors noted that funding according to need was the heart of GHD. Efforts to improve understanding of how donors influence the impartiality of the humanitarian response were underway prior to Stockholm, particularly through the work of the Humanitarian Financing Working Group. The Working Group's recommendations, however, have not all been taken forward at the inter-governmental level.⁷

An important development supported by many donors is the piloting of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Needs Assessment Framework & Matrix.⁸ This aims to provide a comprehensive, sector-by-sector, common analysis of needs, risks and vulnerabilities. Some argue, however, that it is

unrealistically detailed and complicated, and that investment in attaining relevant, reliable and consistent baseline data across key indicators would be more useful at this stage.

The review found that all donors recognised the need to encourage agencies to develop more effective needs assessment methodologies, but that there was little evidence of financial support for independent needs assessment as a separate activity.⁹ Despite some useful tools such as ECHO's 'Global Humanitarian Needs Assessment', there remains significant opportunity to invest in developing better management information and basic common criteria for comparative analysis to prioritise resources and determine effective responses. Discussion is ongoing around the value of a global humanitarian index, akin to the Human Development Index.¹⁰

The review found less consensus about neutrality and independence. Stockholm defined *neutrality* as: 'humanitarian action must not favour any side in an armed conflict or other dispute where such action is carried out'; and *independence* as: 'the autonomy of humanitarian objectives from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented'.¹¹ The review found divergent views amongst both donors and stakeholders as to how and whether these principles should guide donor behaviour, yet donor representatives expressed little concern that such divergence presented a challenge to the commitments made at Stockholm. Stakeholders raised the concern that loose adoption of humanitarian principles weakens the meaning of the principles, and potentially jeopardises the activities of other agencies operating in stricter accordance with them.

Some donors argued that to expect governments to be neutral in the provision of aid was naive, as it is political leaders and legislatures who ultimately determine the response. An alternative interpretation was that governments are not committing to being neutral and independent, but rather to safeguarding the neutrality and independence of operational humanitarian actors. This implies donors remaining at arm's length, and not acting in a directive or operational manner in the field. Others suggested that the principles should be about aid *itself*, rather than about the relationship between donors and agencies. This, however, would imply greater investment in measuring outcomes against principles. In both interpretations, the principles primarily concern restricting the politicisation (or militarisation) of humanitarian action.

Political commitments and policies need operational guidelines for implementation. There was, however, no evidence of guidelines specifically relating to putting principles into practice, or of efforts to monitor adherence to them or measure their impact on humanitarian outcomes. Some new donor initiatives, such as a joint conference on creating guidance for the military on principles of humanitarian action, were being undertaken on an issue-by-issue basis, but these were unrelated to the GHD process.

Agencies have operationalised their commitment to principles through the *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief* of 1994.¹² Whilst most agencies have signed up to the Code, the review found that there has been little monitoring of adherence in practice, and little assessment of the Code's humanitarian impact. The findings of two forthcoming studies, examining the implementation of the Code (marking its ten-year anniversary), will be important resources for stakeholders of GHD. The first study is being carried out by the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), in collaboration with the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR). Disaster Studies Wageningen is undertaking a second study, exploring perceptions of the Code and its practical use, and making recommendations regarding its future.

Operationalising the Good Practice commitments

The GHD Principles and Good Practice document also identified good practice in 13 areas under three broad themes: financing; standards and enhancing implementation; and learning and accountability. The review undertook to identify the areas where progress had been made on these issues. The focus to date has been primarily on financing and on harmonising management and reporting requirements. The provision of adequate, predictable and flexible funding was given priority by donors.

Donors stated a willingness to support the ICRC and UN agencies with increased core funding, multi-year funding agreements, and unearmarked funding at the programmatic, country and regional levels.¹³ A number of donors had developed, or were in the process of developing, more policy-based approaches to partnerships, in which core, multi-year funding is provided to selected NGOs. However, this was justified more for cost-efficiency reasons, than in support of increased independence.

It is difficult to obtain evidence at a system-wide level for efforts to improve the flexibility and predictability of funding. According to the FTS, there does not appear to be a greater supply of unearmarked funding in 2004 than in the previous few years.¹⁴ However, agencies generally tend to under-report unearmarked funding to the FTS. OCHA has been investing, together with the sub-group on statistics and with dedicated funding from ECHO, in improving the FTS and in enhancing reporting to the FTS by agencies, donors and NGOs.

Another potential stumbling-block to GHD is the use made of unearmarked funds. The review found that agencies have, at times, held back unearmarked funds as gap-fillers at the end of the year, on the expectation that additional funds will be disbursed from emergency appeals. Another disincentive to unearmarked funding is donors' concern for recognition of their contributions. Donors that contribute to an operational reserve do not always receive public credit when those funds are used to respond to an emergency. This suggests a need for agreement and commitment to the elements of *good partnership* in order to advance GHD.

There was little evidence of donors formalising mechanisms for funding new crises out of specific contingency reserve funds. Most donors noted that current practice relies instead on unpredictable supplemental allocations from legislatures, and transferring budgets from under-spent areas. This finding is supported by a study on GHD and the European Union.¹⁵ However, there were a number of positive initiatives in the development of thematic funding, including an ECHO grant of €25 million which provided thematic funding to UNHCR, WFP and the IFRC.

In relation to 'contributing responsibly and on the basis of burden-sharing' to humanitarian appeals and actively supporting the formulation of the Common Humanitarian Action Plan (CHAP), there have been a number of advances. Nonetheless, a mismatch remains in perceptions of priority needs between donors and UN agencies. Key findings are that:

- The CHAP needs continued and increased investment in the planning and design of conceptual and strategic interventions, especially in terms of sequencing inputs on a temporal basis, rather than an either-or decision between projects.
- The new UN Humanitarian Coordinator (UNHC) prioritisation guidelines, designed to enable the field to make strategic programming decisions, seem a promising initiative.¹⁶ In turn, a number of donor governments routinely consult the UNHC regarding funding allocations. These changes also pose challenges, not least the need to secure the engagement of all UN agencies in the prioritisation process. Some donors and agencies also pointed out the tensions inherent in the dual Humanitarian and Resident Coordinator roles.
- Some donors have shifted to calendar-year allocations for the CAP, instead of their own financial years, and have developed policies to ensure percentage targets for their support to the CAP. However, the evidence from the 2004 CAP Mid-Year Review suggests that donors continue to channel sizeable contributions outside the CAP.
- Several donors stressed the importance of NGO participation in the CHAP/CAP process, both for coordination purposes and for funding. However, there is no consensus that funding by the CAP is the best route to principled and effective humanitarian response, and many NGOs are in any case reluctant to come under one consolidated appeal. This is an issue of continued debate, particularly as the UN commitment to 'Integrated Missions' raises serious questions about the independence of humanitarian activities from the UN's broader political and peacekeeping functions. Some interviewees noted that, by placing everything under the UN/CAP framework, the community risked losing responsiveness and innovation. In addition, the CAP process invites earmarking at country level, yet many agencies need more flexible tools.

Measuring progress

GHD established the goals which should ensure better humanitarian outcomes, without identifying a way of

measuring progress. In the third area of good practice, *learning and accountability*, it called for evaluations of international responses to humanitarian crises, including assessment of donor performance. The review considered the available and potential mechanisms to ensure that progress could be measured, and donors could be held accountable for their commitments to GHD.

At the inter-governmental level, the OECD-DAC peer reviews are a welcome initiative. The DAC has been a convenient mechanism for reviewing GHD, and the DAC secretariat has been assisted with an additional dedicated resource. As a system-wide mechanism, the secretariat has exercised both a technical competence and a commitment to advancing the initiative. Additionally, its members perceive the DAC as a neutral, trusted entity within which there is a willingness for lesson-learning and the sharing of experience.

At the domestic level, donors have invested considerable resources in systems to measure the performance of implementing partners, but there are relatively few examples of formal systems for the ongoing measurement of donor performance, and even less in relation to GHD. To date, the 1994 Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda is the only system-wide evaluation of humanitarian aid, and impact analysis at the sectoral level is also rare. Greater investment in system- and sector-wide evaluations is needed, with a particular focus on analysing the impact of humanitarian response.¹⁷

In the UK, the Department for International Development (DFID)'s Public Service Agreement with the Treasury includes specific commitments to GHD. A review by the UK's National Audit Office has also compared the principles in DFID's humanitarian policy with the GHD principles, and identified areas where policy coverage of GHD was missing. The British parliament's International Development Committee (IDC) was also due to review DFID's response to Iraq, using the GHD commitments as guidance.

At the field level, the development of impact indicators for the DRC pilot is the only example of an attempt to measure the application of the GHD principles and good practice.¹⁸ The indicators were derived from the Stockholm statement and made some progress in addressing how the principles and best practice could be monitored. They were built on the basis of available data and a realistic appraisal of what might be obtained. Perhaps as a result of this they tend to indicate formal acceptance of GHD rather than adherence in practice, and focus on those aspects which can be monitored within the framework of the CAP/CHAP. As noted, measuring the impact of GHD (not least at the beneficiary level) remains one of the greatest challenges. These shortcomings point to gaps in the system for advancing GHD. They also highlight the challenge of ensuring that GHD has a life outside of the UN framework, and the risks involved in pinning its fate entirely on the success or otherwise of the CAP/CHAP. The development of future indicators for the field could take the following into consideration:

Box 3: Piloting GHD in Burundi and the DRC (Implementation Point 1)

The pilots were designed to apply the Principles and Good Practice of GHD to at least one crisis subject to a CAP. They were not, despite common perception, designed to test GHD in relation to the CAP alone. The Implementation Group established three criteria for selecting the case studies: there had to be a strong UN presence in the field; the crisis had to be 'forgotten'; and there had to be a strong donor presence.

Many interviewees noted the choice of Burundi as problematic. The Burundi pilot was intended to be run during the 2004 appeal; thus, donors entered the process midstream, after the CHAP, the primary UN mechanism for strategic planning and prioritisation, was complete. In addition, very few donors are active in Burundi. Stakeholders questioned the value of implementing GHD in an environment of limited donor engagement. The DRC pilot had the advantage of more realistic timeframes, in that it aimed to address the 2005 appeal. A timeline of activities and a set of impact indicators (discussed below) were developed for the DRC. Lesson learning between the two pilots appears to have been limited.

Overall, the reactions to the pilots ranged from 'good start' to 'resounding failure'. The review found that, despite concerted attempts to pilot the NAFM, the needs assessment component fell seriously short. Observers also noted a lack of clarity as to how the pilots were any different to traditional CAP processes. There was a perception that the pilots were designed to bolster

the CAP as a funding mechanism with little or no reference to the wider programming environment or, more broadly, to whether donors were being guided by humanitarian principles. Despite these concerns, the evidence from the 2004 UN CAP Mid-Year Review suggests that donors were prioritising outside of the CAP. Burundi was 14.9% funded at the Mid-Year Review, and allocations outside the appeal exceeded those inside. The DRC was better supported, with 39.5% funding. However, there was zero funding in the health sector and minimal levels in other important areas, such as protection. This, of course, did not imply that these areas were not being supported. However, it does highlight a concerning mismatch in perceptions of priority needs between UN agencies and donors, as well as the importance of donors coordinating their interventions, particularly at the sectoral level. Neither pilot had evidence of coordinated policy approaches.

At the time of writing, neither pilot had been evaluated in terms of changes in donor behaviour to reflect the commitments to GHD, or the success of the pilots overall in terms of humanitarian impact. The findings from a baseline evaluation of Burundi highlighted that the pilot implementation process was poorly resourced, that the objectives and expected outcomes were poorly communicated, and that it was complicated in terms of ownership and responsibilities between the field and donor headquarters. The overall findings from the pilots will be important in identifying the need for GHD participants to define more clearly the elements of good practice before attempting to operationalise these in the field.

Box 4: Harmonisation (Implementation Point 3)

The GHD Implementation Plan also called on donors to explore the possibility of harmonising the reporting and management requirements they place on implementing organisations. It was recognised that progress to date in the harmonisation of donor development policy and practice had not been matched in the humanitarian sector. The work of the harmonisation sub-group focused exclusively on three agencies: ICRC, UNHCR and OCHA.

Three donors indicated willingness to accept these agencies' Annual Reports – in their current form – as the sole reporting document for all contributions. Other donors agreed to accept a single report in principle, but on the condition that reporting via this format markedly improves, particularly in its focus on results-based information. The sub-group has yet to detail whether there is consensus between donors regarding the information required, and whether and how agencies will provide that information. Such an exercise would need to be accompanied by a more explicit examination of the tensions between increasing harmonisation and decreasing reporting processes, and the maintenance of accountability for public funds.

Regarding management demands, a mapping exercise was undertaken comparing donor approaches. Currently, nearly a dozen donors undertake bilateral consultations with the three agencies concerned; a similar number have bilateral agreements in the form of strategic partnerships, and there is some coordination of strategic approach among Nordic countries. The sub-group is yet to make recommendations on this process. It will be critical to ensure that donors have the capacity to interpret the results of

strategic processes so that they become tools for improvement and learning, rather than simply bureaucratic requirements or a justification for annual budget determinations.

Bilateral initiatives were undertaken with the aim of harmonising and aligning donor practice, particularly at the regional level and in relation to disaster preparedness.

Lessons from harmonising development policy

Donors might like to consider the lessons from the 2004 DAC progress review on the harmonisation of development policy. The objectives and the challenges of this process are strikingly similar to those of GHD. In particular, donors faced most challenges in adapting harmonisation and alignment requirements to 'difficult partnerships'. Arguably, this is the classic environment for humanitarian action. Also of note:

- The voluntary take-up of the harmonisation initiative resulted in significant frustrations amongst donor governments, since its effectiveness was dependent upon collective implementation.
- The process suffered from a lack of communication between headquarters and the field to translate corporate commitments into action.
- Practical know-how and capacity constraints in translating goals into plans/actions need to be addressed from the outset.
- Clear benchmarks for standards and performance need to be set, both for donors and for their partners.

No clear link was established between progress on harmonisation and the speed, volume or predictability of aid.

- Indicators need explicitly to address all the humanitarian principles, not just *impartiality*.
- Harmonisation of reporting and management requirements, as well as coordination of policy approaches, should be a key component.
- Realistic questions, with criteria and reliable data, need to be posed (as an example, it was unclear in the DRC indicators what criteria or data would be used to determine 'equitable sharing of funding requirements among donors').
- Aid policy and practice outside of the CAP/CHAP framework needs to be covered.
- Assessment of humanitarian impact and beneficiary involvement are critical, as well as capturing systems of accountability and clear lines of responsibility.

Ottawa: advancing the initiative

The second GHD meeting, in Ottawa in October 2004, provides an important opportunity to reflect and take stock of progress. The review found that the majority of stakeholders would prefer a more concerted and determined effort to implement the current agenda, rather than an expanded agenda. Interviewees noted that the meeting would benefit from a candid discussion on progress to date, recognising where the successes have come about and where there have been challenges in progressing the initiative, identifying the factors for success, considering

how these might be replicated, and agreeing clear priorities, and the resources required to realise them.

Some of GHD's strongest supporters have cautioned against donors becoming an executive board for humanitarian assistance. Keeping the process and dialogue inclusive, particularly recognising the collective nature of the endeavour, will be important. The Stockholm group must look also to emerging donors, who have resources, political weight and differing perceptions to bring to bear in humanitarian action.

Recommendations*At the inter-governmental level*

- Consider tabling the GHD principles and practice in the OECD-DAC, so that the document can be formally institutionalised and advanced amongst all OECD-DAC donor governments and through a broader DAC policy mechanism.
- Continue efforts in the OECD-DAC to agree a common definition of humanitarian action, which is guided by the nature of need and response, rather than by 'phases' of the crisis or sector-based interventions.
- Deepen the dialogue around humanitarian principles, ensuring that there is broad consensus on their meaning to the donor community, and on how donor behaviour will be guided by them.

- Communicate GHD better, and encourage the full participation of all stakeholders. Outreach and advocacy on the initiative is critical to its success. This should include clearly articulating the objectives, expectations and decision-making processes, and a timeline for progress.
- Develop a realistic appraisal of resources, in particular the means with which the Implementation Group and the OECD-DAC take forward their responsibilities.
- Consider investing in the technical capacity of member representatives in the OECD-DAC, to allow for effective debate on official humanitarian policy.
- Promote the adoption of GHD among *all* official donors, recognising that opening up the GHD agenda to official donors outside of the OECD-DAC will challenge perceptions.
- Determine the means to measure progress, including a way of measuring donor adherence to the Principles and Good Practice.

At the domestic level

- *Donors* should establish a framework for domestic implementation and guidance to the field, recognising that, while GHD does not need parallel structures for

Box 5: Peer review (Implementation Point 2)

In 2004, two donors (Australia and Norway) had the humanitarian component of their development co-operation programme reviewed. The results of the reviews will be available at the end of 2004. In 2005, it is anticipated that five donors will be reviewed. There will be a follow-up meeting of the DAC committee in January 2005 to review the work and recommend ways to develop GHD peer reviews in future. This will be an important juncture for policy-makers to consider the options of advancing the peer review element. There are a number of important issues the DAC will need to consider.

- The DAC is structured and bound by OECD rules, which makes it difficult to open up the review process. A mechanism to allow for more extensive consultation would better reflect the unique and collective nature of the humanitarian endeavour.
- The country case studies of the peer reviews are currently conducted in core development settings. For the humanitarian component, joint country assessments, whereby each year the donor governments being reviewed agree upon a context within which their collective performance is reviewed, would be a more effective approach.
- DAC members are represented by an expert in development policy and programming, rather than in humanitarian policy; the increased emphasis on humanitarian work in the DAC will require increased investment in the technical knowledge and networks of the humanitarian sector.
- Without adequate support, the work of the DAC secretariat will be constrained. Additional resources will be necessary in order to ensure the quality of the core review, and the humanitarian component.

implementation, it does require strategic planning, prioritisation and operational guidance. This process would benefit from a dialogue with domestic and multilateral stakeholders.

- *Agencies* should take advantage of the opportunity GHD provides, become much firmer advocates (or critics) and develop strategies to ensure that the benefits of GHD begin to be meaningful at field level, particularly for the beneficiaries the initiative is ultimately intended to serve. A debate in a forum such as the IASC on the elements of *good partnership* would be valuable.

A clearer understanding of the elements of good partnership is vital to ensure that the combined efforts of donors and implementing partners result in better humanitarian *outcomes*. As an example, agencies should strive to make timely use of advance emergency funding, and should consistently report on general unearmarked contributions.

Notes

- 1 Macrae, J. et al. (2002) *Uncertain Power: The Changing Role of Official Donors in Humanitarian Action*, HPG Report 12. London: ODI; Hammargren, H. (2004) 'Improving Statistical Reporting of Humanitarian Work: Towards a Common Definition', non-paper commissioned by the GHD Implementation Group.
- 2 Hammargren, 'Improving Statistical Reporting'.
- 3 UNDG/ECHA (2004) 'Report of the UNDG/ECHA Working Group on Transition Issues'.
- 4 'Shaping a Stronger United Nations', speech by UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, Chatham House, London, 2 September 2004, www.fco.gov.uk.
- 5 For elaboration on the GHD document on Principles and Good Practice, see www.reliefweb.int/ghd/imgd.pdf.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 DFID (2003) 'Synthesis Summary of the Humanitarian Financing Work Programme', www.reliefweb.int/cap/CAPSWG/Hum_Financing_Studies/hfs.html.
- 8 See www.reliefweb.int/cap/Policy/CAP_PolicyDoc.html.
- 9 Darcy, J. and C.-A. Hofmann (2003) *According to Need? Needs Assessment and Decision-Making in the Humanitarian Sector*, HPG Report 15.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 See www.reliefweb.int/ghd/imgd.pdf for Stockholm documents.
- 12 See www.ifrc.org/publicat/conduct/code.asp.
- 13 Some agencies reported that increased financial flexibility had come at a price, and that there were more audits and evaluations than ever before.
- 14 See www.reliefweb.int/fts.
- 15 Willitts-King, B. (2004) 'Good Humanitarian Donorship and the European Union: A Study of Good Practice and Recent Initiatives', commissioned by Development Cooperation Ireland, 15 September 2004.
- 16 See www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/publications.asp.
- 17 See Hofmann, C.-A. et al. (2004) *Measuring the Impact of Humanitarian Aid*, HPG Report 17. London: ODI.
- 18 See www.reliefweb.int/ghd/GHDDRC-indicatorsrevised18-12-2003.doc.

This HPG Briefing Paper summarises the results of an independent review of progress on GHD, undertaken by HPG/ODI in collaboration with the Center on International Cooperation, New York University. The review, involving over 80 interviews, was carried out between June and September 2004.

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