
QUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY INITIATIVES STRENGTHEN COLLABORATION

Four Quality and Accountability humanitarian initiatives - the [Sphere Project](#), the [Humanitarian Accountability Partnership \(HAP\) International](#), [People In Aid](#), and the [Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action \(ALNAP\)](#), at a meeting hosted by the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR) on 20 July 2011, took the first bold steps to strengthen their collaboration in a frank and wide-reaching assessment of their effectiveness and impact. Hearing no doubts from the sector about the value they have added since their founding in the 1990s, the Chief Executives and Board Chairs of these initiatives recognised nevertheless the need to effectively adapt to the ever changing aid environment, in order to maintain relevance and assist aid providers in enhancing the quality of their response to crisis victims.

COMMITMENT TO ADDRESS FUTURE CHALLENGES

Three of the initiatives primarily concerned with standards and verification, Sphere, HAP and People In Aid, have agreed to work closely together in an associative fashion to develop a common vision for developing and reporting on global standards. Though not directly involved in the standard setting functions of the three, ALNAP committed itself to providing objective supporting evidence, as well as fora for discussion.

The three initiatives, supported by ALNAP, will address the following challenges.

The changing aid environment. The provision of aid in crises is no longer exclusive to a handful of Western-based NGOs and UN agencies. Large southern NGOs, new local NGOs, small expert NGOs, local and municipal authorities, local and foreign military and commercial enterprises, along with consultants, community and religious groups all now play an increasing role. The services provided by the three Quality and Accountability initiatives are accessed by a small proportion of this growing market, while the UN and large segments of the aid community have remained largely under-served by the initiatives. The three initiatives are committed to rapidly expanding their presence and offering customised services to this growing diverse community, promoting their principles, standards and verification methods. In addition, they are committed to working closely with other Quality and Accountability and related initiatives, adapting to the evolving aid community, so that many of these new actors feel comfortable in joining the membership and Boards of the three initiatives.

Expanding the association. The Sphere Project, the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) International and People In Aid are already working closely together in an associative fashion. There will be opportunities in the near future for developing a common brand to all three initiatives, and to explore ways in which they can be more strongly associated, building around a common vision and work plan. Such a process would be open and inclusive, welcoming other initiatives into the alliance, including those from the South, whose explicit mandate is to improve and verify the quality and accountability of humanitarian aid.

Verification of competency. There are increasing calls from crisis-affected communities, governments of disaster-prone countries, donor governments and foundations, as well as the general public, for a fair global system, which will help objectively verify the impact and quality of humanitarian aid agencies - regardless of their origin or size -

against agreed principles and standards. Building such a system would be a major challenge, but is a logical extension of the path-breaking work already undertaken by the three Quality and Accountability initiatives in setting global standards for humanitarian aid and on certifying agencies' ability to be accountable to the people they aim to assist. In September 2011, the three initiatives supported by ALNAP will start exploring together and with their membership just what it would take to put such a system in place.

IMMEDIATE ACTION

The three initiatives, with the support of ALNAP, have agreed on the following decisive actions, to be started immediately, paving the way for a more coordinated and effective approach to their work.

- **Response to the Horn of Africa crisis:** the three initiatives, supported by ALNAP, will work in coordination to establish, for the first time, a single place for advice and assistance to agencies responding to the Horn of Africa crisis.
- **Single web portal:** the three initiatives, with the support of ALNAP, have agreed to start developing a common web space; i.e. a place where humanitarian workers, researchers and policy makers can access the standards, the tools, the case studies and the knowledge bases of all four initiatives.
- **Development of a common field handbook:** the aim is to consolidate and streamline the material presently supplied separately in the Sphere Standards, the HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management, the People In Aid Code and other relevant material.
- **Development of a common evidence-based study** to demonstrate the added value of working to defined international standards. This will be jointly developed by the three initiatives, in collaboration with the Emergency Capacity Building (ECB) Project and the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP). It will also include **a common training module for field staff** to enable aid workers to effectively use and apply their standards, protocols and guidance rather than having to deal with separate handbooks and trainings, as it was the case in the past.

The Chief Executives and Board Chairs of the four initiatives will meet again in **September 2011** to establish the work plan needed to move forward these very promising opportunities.

THE RATIONALE FOR CHANGE

The meeting on 20 July was triggered by some important changes affecting humanitarian action today. The 90's witnessed an unprecedented growth in the size and complexity of humanitarian aid operations around the world. In response to this, humanitarian agencies established an interconnected system of quality assurance initiatives, to set standards for their work, provide better accountability to the people they seek to assist, ensure good practice in the management of their people and increase the veracity of their evaluation systems.

Today most aid operations last five or more years and are sited in and around conflicts. The traditional aid providers of the UN agencies and a handful of large NGOs have been joined by military forces, commercial companies, local NGOs and small specialised NGOs. Local, national, regional and municipal authorities, that were often by-passed in the past, now form a central part of disaster response, and are likely to play an increasing role in the future, as climate change and economic volatility promise an increased frequency of natural hazards and new forms of conflicts, leading to more life-threatening famine, flooding, economic crisis and war. The environment and nature of

humanitarian crises are changing. The mechanisms for ensuring the quality of aid response need to adapt ahead of these changes to remain viable and vibrant.

Geneva, 5 August 2011

From the Chief Executives and Board Chairs:

Erik Johnson, Chair of the Sphere Project
(Head of Humanitarian Response, DanChurchAid)

John Damerell, Sphere Project Manager

Matthew Carter, Chair of the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International
(Humanitarian Director, Catholic Agency For Overseas Development)

Angela Raven-Roberts, Executive Director of the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International

Neil Casey, Chair of People In Aid
(Independent)

Jonathan Potter, People In Aid Executive Director

Ivan Scott, Chair of the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
(Head of Programme Performance and Accountability, Oxfam GB)

John Mitchell, Director of the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action