



## NGOs and Humanitarian Reform: An Opportunity to Influence the Future of Humanitarian Reform

### Background

Since the beginning of the UN-led humanitarian reform process, there have been several suggestions about the need to better involve NGOs – particularly national and local NGOs – in the various aspects of reform. The external evaluation of the cluster approach noted that the lack of involvement of national and community-based organisations was one of “the most disappointing findings” and that while “Partnerships have improved marginally...no significant gains were seen for local NGO participants.”

### Improving NGO Engagement and Downward Accountability

National and local NGOs are absent in many reform forums and even international NGOs often find it difficult to consistently engage in the various processes. National and local NGOs are mostly unable to access UN pooled funds and NGOs are excluded from direct access to the CERF.

A three-year project started in September 2008 (currently funded by DfID) to increase the effective engagement of international, national, and local NGOs in humanitarian reform (clusters, humanitarian financing, and Humanitarian Coordinator strengthening). The project places a particular emphasis on catalyzing NGO engagement in humanitarian reform processes.

### Project Focus

The project will focus around the main themes requiring further work in the current UN-led reforms:

1. partnerships between humanitarian actors;
2. downwards accountability to beneficiaries;
3. programme impact on populations receiving humanitarian aid; and
4. at the global level, international policies related to reform and partnership.

The focus will be on clusters; innovation and lesson-learning related to NGO engagement in humanitarian coordination and financing mechanisms; and promoting effective means to represent the views of crisis-affected populations through evidence-based advocacy, a focus on downwards accountability, and improving the impact of humanitarian action. The consortium members, and in particular the networking role of ICVA, will facilitate a global outreach.

### Partnership Approach

Building upon existing initiatives like the Global Humanitarian Platform’s *Principles of Partnership*, and working as closely as possible with donors, UN agencies, and partners, the project aims to connect international policy and learning, with country level experience. To meet the overall objective of the project to improve the efficiency and reach of humanitarian response for beneficiary populations, the project will produce practical guidance for NGOs working in humanitarian situations. There will be an explicit focus on two-way capacity-building and inclusion of national and local civil society. Regional workshops will take place later in the project to learn lessons and, throughout the project, emphasis will be placed on the importance of partnership.

## Country Focus

The current state of coordination and response will be mapped to create a baseline against which progress can be measured over the three years in four focus countries:

1. Afghanistan,
2. Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC),
3. Ethiopia, and
4. Zimbabwe.

Sudan will be the fifth focus country, when additional funds are secured.

NGOs in at least five secondary countries – Haiti, Indonesia, Palestine, Mozambique, and Lesotho – will provide supporting evidence by regularly sharing information about clusters, response, and partnership, which will help to map the bigger picture beyond the focus countries and to be able to make improvements. ICVA is also working on bringing in more NGOs into the secondary country mapping.

## Activities

Humanitarian Reform Officers will be engaged in 2009 to provide liaison in each of the four (to five) focus countries to carry out the activities related to the project. An International Project Manager will have the oversight of the project, providing support to the Humanitarian Reform Officers in each country and working to disseminate information and share lessons.

The activities will include, *inter alia*, the following:

- ◆ a mapping study in each focus country, looking at trends and dynamics of humanitarian response;
- ◆ promotion of shared needs assessment frameworks;
- ◆ development of practical guidance and best practice;
- ◆ beneficiary workshops to be held in each focus country;
- ◆ supporting and building capacity of national NGOs for humanitarian response; and
- ◆ international advocacy to UN and donors based on elaborated policy recommendations.

## The Consortium

The project is being run by a consortium of seven NGOs: ActionAid (as lead agency), CARE International UK, CAFOD, International Rescue Committee, ICVA, Oxfam, and Save the Children UK.

**For more information** about the project, visit: [www.icva.ch/ngosandhumanitarianreform.html](http://www.icva.ch/ngosandhumanitarianreform.html) or write to <[secretariat@icva.ch](mailto:secretariat@icva.ch)>.

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