

Research Report

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Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian & Cultural)

Transparency of humanitarian non-governmental and United Nations organizations



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Forum	GA3: Social, Humanitarian & Cultural
Issue:	Transparency of humanitarian non-governmental and United Nations organizations
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Introduction

More than twenty thousand international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), be they in the humanitarian or development department, are operating today. Though their diversity and reach is difficult to estimate, the role they take on as development assistance implementers and political counter-power is gradually gaining more and more importance.

Contrary to other charities, NGOs don't directly benefit from their contributions, as the collected funds go to a third party, the one targeted by the organization. Thus compassion, solidarity and concern for the wellbeing of others are believed to be the driving force behind the NGO movement. As such, NGOs have been accorded the presumptions of moral authority, altruism and absence of conflicts of interests. But similar to corporations and governments, NGOs aren't infallible.

Recently, they've been undergoing a crisis of accountability and transparency, damaging their credibility, hence the growing demands to reveal to both donors and aid recipients that every single cent which has been donated is used in the most appropriate way possible, all in all, that they are using their financial resources in a professional and transparent way. Despite this fact, most organizations still refuse to share information and to admit to the need of increased transparency. This could become quite problematic as it's usually regarded as a key requirement for good governance and successful feedback systems.

So the question now is, how can we promote and implement effective measures to ensure the transparency of humanitarian non-governmental and UN-Organizations?

Definition of Key Terms

Accountability

The action of ensuring that officials in public, private and voluntary sector organizations are answerable for their actions and that there is redress when duties and commitments are not met.

Corruption

Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. This includes active corruption –corrupting – and passive corruption – being corrupted.

Cluster

A cluster is a system aiming to make humanitarian response more predictable by organizing a sectoral coordination among humanitarian actors and stakeholders - including UN agencies, NGOs, government representatives and other civil society organizations in some cases. The objective is to facilitate more predictable leadership, improved planning and prioritization and enhanced accountability.

Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)

An NGO is a non-profit, voluntary citizens' group, which can be organized on a local, national or international level. They perform a large number of services and humanitarian functions, such as bringing citizen concerns to governments, encouraging and monitoring policies as well as promoting political participation through provision of information. The analysis and expertise they provide can serve as early warning mechanisms and help monitor and implement international agreements.

Transparency

Transparency is as much a duty as it is a right and implies honesty, openness, communication and accountability. Through this process, organizations can show that they have respected agreements and engagements with and towards the populations and associations they work with. As such, full information should be available for cooperation, collaboration and collective decision-making on the issues.

General Overview

Humanitarian aid is given to assist those affected by natural disasters, human conflict or other forms of severe political, economic or social breakdowns. It aims to prevent and alleviate human suffering in the context of life-threatening situations, which is mainly done through the short-term provision of food, water, shelter and emergency services to affected areas, though initial humanitarian operations often evolve into longer-term reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts.

Humanitarian disaster of Haiti – 2010

The earthquake in Haiti was perhaps, after Hurricane Katarina in 2004, one of the most flagrant examples of humanitarian crises where the lack of transparency was decisive in the failure of immediate humanitarian aid. The earthquake had had devastating effects: more than 222.000 people had been killed, 300 000 others had been wounded and 1.5 million people had lost their home. The international response to this crisis had been extremely favourable and ended up with a total capital of 40 million American dollars, making the people hope for a better life in the not so distant future.

One year has passed since the 2010 earthquake that plunged Haiti into chaos, and NGOs are still mobilized to save Haitians survivors instead of cooperating with the population to find sustainable solutions to their now destroyed livelihoods. Port-au-Prince looks more like a slum than anything else and the living conditions of the Haitians aren't getting any easier: displacees live in precarious tents and more than 8 million square meter needs to be cleaned up of all debris. On the 400 000 destroyed lodgings, less than a thousand have been reconstructed and in the mean time, cholera had hit the population, killing more than 3.300 people in its spree. Furthermore, the elections that should have placed a strong leader at the head of the country turned into a total fiasco.

So what happened with all the financial funds and how come the situation didn't improve? Most NGOs replied that the lack of coordination was at the origin of the debacle.

Indeed, the cluster system, which usually proves to be more helpful than not, proved to be surprisingly inefficient. The explanation to this phenomenon can be found in the sheer numbers of NGOs on the field just after the earthquake, which ultimately amounted to more than a thousand. Next to well-known NGOs like the International Red Cross there was World Vision, Save the Children and of course Doctors without Borders, but a lot of anonymous individuals or associations, which no one seemed to know, were present there as well but weren't integrated to the cluster as not identified. This led to organizations carrying on

separate actions, which weren't always beneficial for the population and thus hindered the contribution of effective aid.

The last factor to this debacle could be derived from the lack of transparency concerning the management of all the donations of NGOs. A survey undertaken by the independent body Disaster Accountability Project (DAP) revealed that approximately 80% of all the NGOs refused to show where and how the money was spent, hence corroborating the already existing suspicions.

The Different Types of Corruption

Corruption in humanitarian aid undermines the fundamental purpose of humanitarian action. Its effects include inappropriately located infrastructure, relief supplies being misplaced and consequently not given to the needing affected communities, and finally the unequal distribution of aid. Such outcomes ignore the needs of the intended beneficiaries of aid, often further marginalising those from the poorest sections of society and deepening existing social conflicts. Tackling corruption in humanitarian aid is therefore key to ensuring effective and equitable humanitarian assistance to those in greatest need. As such, fighting against corruption and promote transparency and its implementation do have the common goal of delivering help in our maximum capacity.

Extensive and complexes, the global humanitarian aid system encompasses a large variety of actors, including United Nations (UN) bodies, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), international NGOs, international donors, and of course the governments of countries affected by emergencies. Although many efforts have been deployed to address the weaknesses of the system, certain characteristics may provide opportunities for corruption in humanitarian aid.

Three reasons exist to why humanitarian aid is at risk from corruption: conditions inherent in humanitarian emergencies; characteristics of the 'humanitarian aid system'; and levels of transparency and accountability in recipient countries.

Conditions inherent in humanitarian emergencies

As humanitarian organisations work in extraordinarily difficult circumstances, often characterised by damaged or destroyed infrastructure, disrupted community services, mass population movements, outbreaks of disease and actual or potential conflicts, aid must be well targeted and quickly delivered to reach those in need if it must have an important impact.

The urgency of the situation can allow corruption to flourish as the authorities and

humanitarian actors must work hard to ensure proper accountability and coordination of relief and reconstruction efforts. The imperative to reach affected communities quickly can lead to a trade-off between effective disbursement controls and streamlined, unbureaucratic procedures. Finally, errors in the distribution of aid may arise, resulting either in an over-or undersupply of aid, both capable to cause corruption: in the case of undersupply, individuals may be forced to engage in corrupt activities in a desperate bid to survive while where there is oversupply, aid not needed for survival may become available for illegitimate purposes.

Characteristics of the 'humanitarian aid system'

Characteristics that are prone to increase corruption include the accountability gap, the number of actors and the diverse forms of aid.

Levels of transparency and accountability in recipient countries

Countries affected by humanitarian crises are more often than not sporting low levels of transparency and accountability, thus rendering humanitarian aid vulnerable to corruption. Humanitarian actors must in such cases work harder to ensure that sufficiently robust control mechanisms are in place and be extremely vigilant towards subtle forms of corruption, with which they don't necessarily have experience.

The UN and the Notion of Transparency

The UN has put significant efforts in reforming and improving humanitarian response over the past decade, many of them turning out to bring positive effects. Several agencies, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), are reaching out to a more diverse set of humanitarian partners. In the mid of all these changes, accountability and transparency are increasingly becoming a focus: guidelines and norms have been revised and strengthened and today, many of the traditional challenges - that assessments are not coordinated or that methodologies don't match up - are being addressed. UN agencies and NGOs alike have improved their work in every phase of the programme cycle, from program implementations to evaluations.

Humanitarian response is increasingly driven by evidence rather than anecdote, which marks a profound shift akin to the change in how health care was delivered in the 1970s and 1980s. Nowadays, Emergency Relief coordinators and humanitarian coordinators garner more respect than they used to a few decades before; transparency across the funding spectrum - 160 agencies and donors have signed up to the International Aid

Transparency Initiative (IATI), and clusters and pooled funds have improved how the UN organizes itself and coordinates in some response settings.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA)

The UNOCHA is the part of the UN secretariat responsible for bringing humanitarian actors together and ensuring that methodical and coherent help is directly available in case of emergencies, thus ensuring a framework within which each actor can contribute to its maximum capacity. End December 2012, the OCHA announced the addition of their signature to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI). This initiative will contribute to greater accountability, data usability and generally improve the effectiveness of the OCHA all the while showing the importance they attach to transparency.

Transparency International

Nowadays present in more than a hundred countries, Transparency International saw the light of day in 1993. Their primary goal is to bring a significant amount of change to the world, especially concerning corruption. While much remains to be done, a lot has been achieved a well, such as the creation of international conventions against corruption, the prosecution and seizure of corrupt leaders and their dishonestly gained possessions, and finally, companies held accountable for their behaviour both at home and abroad.

Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)

This committee was established in 1992, on the mandate of the UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182 on the strengthening of humanitarian assistance. Its main functions are the coordination of the involved UN and non-UN humanitarian partners, clearly dividing their responsibilities for the various aspects of humanitarian assistance, the development of humanitarian policies, the identification of gaps in aid responses and their fulfilment, and finally, encouraging effective application of humanitarian principles.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1995	Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief
2003	Humanitarian Ombudsman Project, now HAP International
August 23 rd , 2004	Hurricane Katarina
June 6 th , 2005	International Non-Governmental Organization's Accountability Charter
January 12 th , 2010	Haiti Earthquake
Late July, 2010	Pakistan Floods

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The UN has always been an active member and supporter of transparency, accountability and integrity and over time, has developed a robust accountability system which rests on internal controls and oversight mechanisms, as well as tools to promote transparency and integrity.

While a lot of organizations outside of the UN promote transparency and implement various charters, networks, databases and guidelines, the UN itself, except from having integrated a few of these structures, hasn't worked on this issue except perhaps for the following Convention:

- UN Convention against Corruption, 9 December 2003

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP)

Established in 1997, ALNAP was conceived as a device to provide a forum on accountability, learning and performance issues for the humanitarian sector. Originally, its network should have been limited to a small group of about 30 members, but quickly this

plan had to be revised seeing the great demand and interest in the issues addressed. In 2011 a maximum of a hundred full members was decided, and still remains to this day. The evaluation of humanitarian action is one of their many points of interest and as such training modules and guidance booklets were developed in this area. The development of high-quality tools and profound analysis on learning and accountability issues for the humanitarian sector quickly gained ALNAP their current well-established reputation.

Disaster Accountability Project (DAP)

DAP, while created in 2007, has risen to become a leading non-profit organization providing long-term independent oversight of disaster management systems. Its primary objective resumes in saving lives and reducing the amount of distress after disasters through the maximization of preparedness, response and relief thanks to citizen oversight and engagement, policy research and advocacy as well as public education. The community behind DAP strives to promote transparency, and encourages the public to participate in overseeing community-based organization, and discuss disaster preparedness and relief.

Financial Tracking Service (FTS)

Managed by the OCHA, FTS is a regularly updated international database where donors or recipient organizations report any kind of given humanitarian aid, such as the one provided by NGOs or private donations, just to give a few examples. This enables FTS to show the extent of humanitarian aid populations in crisis receive in proportion to their needs. Special focus is given on consolidated and flash appeals, as they cover the major humanitarian crises and their funding requirements are well defined.

Global Accountability Project (GAP)

GAP is a project initiated in 2011 by One World Trust organization, which has developed cross-sector principles and guidelines of accountability with help from NGOs, corporate and inter-governmental sectors. This specific project offers practical recommendations on how to increase the transparency and responsiveness of global organizations.

International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATA)

Launched during the third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra in 2008, IATI is a voluntary initiative involving a multitude of stakeholders, from developing countries to civil society organizations, seeking to improve aid transparency in order to increase its effectiveness in tackling poverty. It's through the consultation with developing countries major

stakeholders that IATI's work first began. Asking them about the information they sought, they then discussed with potential donors the most efficient and effective way of acquiring it. These consultations then served as a basis to the development of a common and open standard for the publication of aid information, now named the IATI Standards. All information concerning the assistance provided will then be published by the donors in the IATI Registry, which acts as an online repository or index of links for all of the raw data published to IATI.

International Non-Governmental Organization's Accountability Charter

The result of two years' hard work, the Accountability Charter has been drafted in London by five leading international NGOs, under which Amnesty International, Greenpeace, Oxfam, Save the Children and Care and implemented on the 6th of June 2005. To this day, eleven other heads of human rights organizations have publicly ratified this international accountability charter for the non-profit sector.

Possible Solutions

A few points can be explored and used to enhance and promote transparency of UNOs and NGOs alike. The two points below mostly concentrate on the exchange of information, but other solutions, like auditing, establishing corruption prevention measures... are equally important.

Transparency and Information Exchange

Maintaining permanent contact with key actors of projects implies easier access to information, thus enabling the establishment of sustainable relationships based on mutual respect and trust, as well as transparency concerning accountability.

Before any action is undertaken, NGOs and UNOs that may be able to help will have to present a certain amount of information, including:

- General information about the organization (Who? What? Why?)
- Who financed the possible action that can be undertaken?
- Who is responsible for this project and who will be the spokesman?
- Details concerning that possible action: what area does it cover, how much time it will take to complete, who will be participating and how will these participants be selected?

During their project, regular reports will have to be written and passed on to the partnering organizations to measure the progress that has been achieved in a certain period of time. These will naturally include financial data but also the significant modifications made to the original plans and the so far achieved results. All data will have to be written in a way that anyone can easily understand it from the start.

The shared information will thus allow key partners to actively participate, take decisions knowing all the background information, and be sure who's to be held accountable for what. This way, transparency is more than a simple unidirectional flow of data: it becomes a permanent dialogue between an organization and its key stakeholders; based on the information they give and seek.

Management of complaints, reclamations and suggestions

The feedback received from key stakeholders is crucial, as it'll simultaneously allow the organization to understand and check if they are obtaining the necessary and wanted changes they had intended. Hence, the possibility to send this feedback should be available to all, anonymous or signed.

Observations, complaints, and suggestions originating from the community should be reported and noted in a specific database, which could be as simple as a paper notebook or a complex program.

A free phone line, accessible to the population would ease these exchanges. This implies the presence of a person specifically trained for this purpose and apt to channel all complaints and suggestions.

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