

Partnership: principles, practices and paradigm

Feedback of workshop 4 held in Brussels 15 and 16 November 2001

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Word count draft: words

OBJECTIVES

Reach a common understanding of partnership

Explore areas of common interest and concern

Outline the follow-up

1. INTRODUCTION: PARTNERSHIP WITHIN A CONTEXT; THE FPA

The concept of *partnership* that characterises the relation between ECHO and the humanitarian organisations is defined in the Provisions of the Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA). The FPA itself is the legal instrument adopted by the European Commission to carry out Council Regulation 1257/996 on Humanitarian aid, and in particular its Chapter II, “Procedures for the implementation of humanitarian aid”.

Partnership within the FPA refers to a number of different legal entities and humanitarian actors. It is based on a number of preconditions, such as verification of the eligibility of the humanitarian organisation, (vid. Article 7 of the Regulation).

The humanitarian organisations receive grants from ECHO, but they can not be considered the beneficiaries of these funds. The idea of *partnership* introduces a clear differentiation with other types of relationship that the Commission may have with external actors, such as sub-contracting. The FPA governs the reciprocal roles and responsibilities in the implementation of relief operations. It is not *partnership between equals*, but an “*asymmetrical partnership*”.

ECHO and the humanitarian organisations are empowered with different obligations. ECHO is a public administration and Non Governmental Organisations manage private funds and are generally international.

The right to initiatives by ECHO or by its partners is clearly stated in the FPA (article 1).

2. PRINCIPLES OF PARTNERSHIP

An asymmetrical relation is neither an obstacle to a *partnership* based on trust and respect of common principles and values, nor on a commitment things together and in the respect of freedom and autonomy of each partner.

Partnership must not be limited only to the implementation of relief operations; it is a global concept and a dynamic process that can evolve.

The debate on partnership is incomplete if it is only considered in its “vertical” perspective, (ECHO-humanitarian organisations). There is a “transversal” dimension (relations between humanitarian organisations) to be fully developed.

Bellow is a suggested set of principles that could be used to strengthen partnership and which could serve as the basis for activities/practices and a work plan.

3. TEN PRINCIPLES OF PARTNERSHIP

1. Partners consult to determine objectives, principles, values and criteria related to humanitarian action. Flexibility and equity (non-discrimination) are seen as shared core values.
2. Each partner knows and accepts the mandates, charters or statutes of the other.
3. Partners establish a climate of mutual trust and respect.
4. Partners inform and create networks.
5. Partners share responsibilities.
6. Partners promote accountability of the whole system, in particular to the recipients of aid.
7. Partners ensure monitoring and evaluation of the partnership. They share successes and failures to develop best practices.
8. Partners promote a learning environment by engaging in the dissemination of experience and best practices
9. Partners commit to reinforce the linkages between relief, rehabilitation and development, with a view to help the recipients of humanitarian aid regaining a minimum of self-sufficiency.
10. Partners promote vertical and horizontal co-ordination

The competition for resources – human or financial – between humanitarian organisations is a clear limitation to the principles stated.

The group left open the issue of how to deal with some of the constraints of actual co-operation and co-ordination. Some agreed that co-ordination should be a pre-condition for funding.

4. ACTIVITIES/PRACTICES LINKED TO THE 10 PRINCIPLES

Human resources and communication appear as the priority issues that should be addressed.

- Assessing and evaluating international humanitarian action. (Main ref. 3, 6, 7)
The project cycle includes assessments and evaluations of international humanitarian action that could be carried out jointly or with external assistance. Such joint work will help develop a “learning environment”.
- Accountability towards recipients of action (Main ref. 6, 7, 9)

Assistance and resources also flow horizontally within affected countries between wealthier and less affected sections of society (but it is rarely measured accurately if at all). Closer scrutiny of the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance is needed throughout the process to increase accountability to the intended recipients of humanitarian action.

- **Certification system (Main ref. 1, 7)**
A certification system should be adopted (or developed as a tailor made “ISO system” for a humanitarian environment) and, if necessary, training and other means provided to upgrade the certification process.
- **Training (Main ref. 7 and 8)**
Training could be made available to all partners on topics such as the revised FPA. Other topics for training would include human rights, security, capacity building, fundraising, links between humanitarian partners and academia and other issues that need mainstreaming. ECHO should act as a training clearinghouse.
- **Common guidelines (Main ref. 8 and 9)**
The partnership should seek to establish common guidelines about, for example, procurement policies.
- **Development of a platform for communication and consultation (Main ref. 2, 3 and 4)**
Communication and consultation should complement existing bodies and should seek to create a better mutual understanding of partner’s mandates and operational frameworks.
- **Codes of best practices (Main ref. 7 and 8)**
Analysis of humanitarian action cycles (assessments, monitoring of action and evaluation) should contribute to the identification and dissemination of best practices, which could be embodied in a code of best practices.

5. FUTURE PROSPECTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Set-up a working group for follow-up of workshop (see composition of group above)

Present report, which reflects both discussions and orientations for the future

Define working plan considering a link between the work of the other workshops and a liaison between existing expert groups, institutions and networks.

Formalise support from ECHO

6. CONCLUSION

The process should lead to a quantum leap towards a cultural shift putting solidarity between humanitarian organisations and with the beneficiaries in the centre.