

Humanitarian Accountability Partnership - International

"making humanitarian action accountable to beneficiaries"

Newsletter

Issue No. 4

June 2005

A NEW FORMAT

WELCOME to the fourth HAP-I newsletter. In this edition we are introducing a new format and new content, which we believe will be of interest and use to a wider range of humanitarians.

Each bi-monthly newsletter will include a main editorial feature written by guest contributors or HAP-I staff, to challenge our thinking and understanding on key issues around humanitarian accountability. This month we will start with a op-ed (opinion-editorial) piece by Nicholas Stockton.

Each newsletter will also include a case study from a HAP-I member, to discuss the ups, downs and challenges of trying to be more accountable to beneficiaries in real life projects.

For those interested to see how HAP-I and Members are promoting accountability, there will be a regular update on either a) the progress we make on our Accountability Work-Plans (AWPs) or b) progress in implementing our New Emergencies Policy (NEP).

Finally, there will be an update on key publications, links or events, which explore or promote humanitarian accountability.

OP-ED

What do you think?

In future issues of the HAP-I newsletter, this space will be filled by you: members, supporters or critics of HAP-I. However, for this new format newsletter, we thought that we would tell you what we in the HAP-I Secretariat think about a few things:

We believe that:

■ the accountability deficit within the humanitarian system is the main cause of its shaken moral authority, its declining credibility and deteriorating security in the field.

■ were the humanitarian system to take proper account of the views, needs, interests and fears of its intended beneficiaries, this step would radically improve the cost effectiveness and the outcome of humanitarian action

■ the greatest threat to achieving HAP-I's vision of an accountable humanitarian system resides within the largest humanitarian agencies whose non-accountable practices set a benchmark of irresponsibility and inefficiency for the system at large

■ the greatest threat to HAP-I's mission to promote better practices of accountability resides in the non-compliance of our existing membership with the HAP-I Principles of Accountability, especially in new emergencies.

■ the greatest failing of the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative is that it has no strategy for identifying quality management in humanitarian action, and thus official humanitarian resource

allocation will continue to be based upon patronage rather than performance

■ coordination is grossly over-rated as a means to improve the outcome of humanitarian action. The actual practice of coordination is very expensive, it often reduces choice for those in need of humanitarian assistance, it invariably locks-out intended beneficiaries, it reinforces the power of the humanitarian aid oligopoly (and we all know its members) and it frequently fails to produce a coordinated outcome.

■ if just 10% of the costs of aid coordination were devoted instead to quality management (and in particular to making humanitarian action accountable to its intended beneficiaries), humanitarian outcomes would be improved by at least double the factor.

■ relief agency accreditation is coming, one way or another. Either we design and manage an NGO system that is able to recognise quality management in a reliable, consistent and coherent manner, or the official donors will impose their own system upon us and along with it their political agendas

So, now we have had our chance, what do you think?

Nicholas Stockton is the Executive Director of HAP-I.

This piece can be quoted only with full references.

If you have any comments, thoughts or feedback, please send these to:

newsletter@hapinternational.org

Your responses may be published on our website.

CASE STUDY

A complaints mechanism for over 200,000 people.

The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) provides food aid to over 200,000 people affected by war in 3 regions of the North Caucasus (Ingushetia, Chechnya and Dagestan). Ensuring the food is distributed to the intended beneficiaries in a timely and efficient manner is the greatest challenge, as people's location changes, their family status changes and the donor criteria for beneficiary selection changes.

In response to a growing number of queries from beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries, the DRC developed a formal mechanism for receiving and processing complaints, queries and feedback, to ensure that they could deal more efficiently and effectively with people's concerns.

Nine information centres were set up and a team was assigned in the DRC Caucasus' head office, to create an Information and Complaints System. The complaints were heard, documented, processed and investigated by a team of 25 staff which includes mobile teams.

Upon request, this system has recently been reviewed by HAP-I. The major findings were positive. The system has achieved an impressive level of efficiency in dealing with between 5,000 and 10,000 individual queries and complaints each month. The majority of complaints are about food aid entitlement, and there appears to be high levels of beneficiary satisfaction with DRC's

handling of these. As well as helping to ensure that the aid is delivered to the intended beneficiaries, there were numerous additional benefits of the system. These included a raised sense of beneficiary dignity as well as the maintenance of a trusting and transparent relationship between DRC and the general population. Further, the reviewer found that the current complaints handling infrastructure could be easily modified to provide a more comprehensive range of information to beneficiaries and to receive more general complaints. Currently, the range of complaints solicited are related to food aid only.

The costs of the system are currently less than 5 % of total programme costs, and HAP-I believes that this is a small cost, given the huge benefits accrued to programme, beneficiary dignity, trust and security. HAP-I also believes that Donors will willingly sanction even greater expenditure, once they fully realize the benefits of promoting this level of accountability to beneficiaries.

Using the DRC experience, ten points were noted, as contributing to an effective complaints mechanism for humanitarian contexts:

First, people should have knowledge of the procedure and easy physical access to use it.

Second, the procedure itself should be non-threatening to use and even welcoming, so that feedback and complaints are actively solicited.

Third, there should be parameters to the variety of complaints solicited. Complaints should be

received about functions which the agency is at least partly claiming responsibility for.

Fourth, the recording and transmission of complaints information should allow that a complaint is clearly understood and transmitted without any alteration.

Fifth, complainants should be given tangible acknowledgement that the complaint has been received

Sixth, a minimum time period should be given for the complainant to receive an answer.

Seventh, all complaints should be dealt with sensitively & confidentially.

Eighth, the complainant should receive a response that comprises a clear answer and explanation, as well as an indication that the complaint has gone through an established due process.

Ninth, the complainant should acknowledge that they have understood the answer, and in case of dispute, they can apply again

Tenth, the complainants and staff should be made aware that the system has alternative channels for grievance, and these should be explained.

Peter Klansoe, DRC
Zia Choudhury, HAP-I

A summary of the report and the full report are available on HAP-I website:

[Click here!](#)

ACCOUNTABILITY WORK-PLAN UPDATE

Having a two-year Accountability Work-Plan is a requirement of every HAP-I Member. The AWP's help Members to systematically raise their accountability to beneficiaries in all aspects of their work.

The past two months have seen much planning around the development of activities to promote understanding of accountability issues at the project site level. All Members recognise that institutional changes at HQ level need to be matched by project level action. This action is also endorsed by our [New Emergencies Policy](#) (NEP), which is an agreement between HAP-I members to make a special effort to promote the HAP-I Accountability Principles in new and significant emergencies.

The first action taken under the NEP involved, HAP-I Accountability Advisor, Zia Choudhury, conducting an exploratory visit to two Darfur states and Khartoum. His full report can be seen on the HAP-I website. In brief, the visit highlighted that there is currently a serious lack of accountability to beneficiaries, which is especially highlighted by limited or no consultation with beneficiaries at all stages of the Project Cycle. All major agencies agreed that more consultation, information and communication was required with beneficiaries, but the main reasons cited for not doing these things include: too much pressure to spend funds quickly, not enough practical knowledge of how to communicate effectively with beneficiaries, limited or no commitment from head

offices and donors to be accountable to beneficiaries and a general belief that "we are too busy saving lives to be accountable". HAP-I and its members, as well as some non-members agreed that with some extra leadership and specialist support, they would contribute to a process of improving communication between themselves and beneficiaries. A Proposal has been developed by HAP-I to deploy support staff to Sudan, to work with Member agencies in specifically developing information systems and complaints mechanisms for beneficiaries. In addition, we plan to support individual members' efforts and plans to achieve compliance with the [HAP-I Principles of Accountability](#). In the next issue, we will update our progress on implementing this proposal.

MORE ACCOUNTABILITY....

Publications and articles:

- [REAL Aid: an agenda for making aid work – Action Aid Report, June 2005](#)
- [Holding NGOs Accountable, by Oxford Analytica, April 2005](#)
- [Under Attack, by Hugh Williamson, April 2005](#)
- [Asking Do-Gooders to Prove they Do Good, by Jon Christensen, January 2004](#)

Useful Links include:

Key initiatives to promote quality and accountability in humanitarian sector:

- www.alnap.org
- www.hapinternational.org
- www.peopleinaid.org
- www.sphereproject.org
- www.urd.org

DATES AND EVENTS:

- ALNAP Bi-annual Meeting, 8 & 9 June 2005
- HAP-I Debate, September 2005, on the motion (preliminary proposal, tbc):

"The Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative: Tragedy or Farce?"

BEING HELD TO ACCOUNT...

In each issue **you** can pose a question to a humanitarian figure or organisation, regarding their accountability to beneficiaries. Send your brief questions to the newsletter e-mail. This issue, Zia Choudhury, HAP-I Accountability Advisor asks Directors from three of our Members: World Vision, CARE International and Oxfam GB:

"Staff from all your agencies have expressed to HAP-I that one of the main reasons for their limited accountability to beneficiaries is due to the lack of resources to meaningfully participate with intended beneficiaries. For the Tsunami response, resources were not a constraint. Can you demonstrate that your accountability to beneficiaries has now significantly improved?"

Please send in all correspondence to (or if you want to unsubscribe): newsletter@hapinternational.org

We welcome any feedback, questions, or useful links, articles, events and more.

*Thanks and good reading,
HAP-I Secretariat*

You can download this issue (PDF and word) from HAP-I web:
www.hapinternational.org