

HAP & Sphere Support Program in Myanmar following Cyclone Nargis Case Study - June 2009

Introduction

In the hours and days following Cyclone Nargis which hit Myanmar overnight on May 2 & 3, 2008 with 200km per hour winds and tidal surges of over 4 meters high, thousands of Myanmar volunteers, and staff of local and international agencies were providing support to address the immediate, life-saving needs among the estimated 2.4 million people affected by the disaster.

By mid May 2008, twelve HAP members were responding or preparing to respond to the cyclone: ACTED, CAFOD, CARE, Christian Aid, Concern Worldwide, Dan Church Aid, Muslim Aid, Oxfam GB, Save the Children UK, Tearfund, MERCY Malaysia and World Vision. Of these, CARE, Save the Children and World Vision were already operational, with each having 500-600 existing staff in country; Christian Aid, Dan Church Aid and Tearfund had been working in the country through partners. As part of the commitment by HAP members to make a special collective effort to apply the HAP Principles of Accountability from the outset of all new humanitarian emergencies, a series of HAP's NEP ([New Emergency Policy](#)) teleconferences were coordinated through the HAP Secretariat in Geneva (May 14th and 30th and June 17th) in order to discuss with members' strategies for promoting quality and accountability in the Myanmar context and explore specific action points for members and support from the HAP Team. By the end of June, several HAP members, including Tearfund, MERCY Malaysia, CARE, World Vision and Save the Children had deployed quality and accountability advisors from their respective Head Offices.

As part of the NEP discussions, it was agreed that HAP staff be deployed in collaboration with Sphere consultants to enhance understanding and improve practice of humanitarian accountability and quality management for HAP member agencies and other international and local NGOs in the Nargis Response. This led to the deployment of several HAP and Sphere consultants and emergency staff to assist and support agencies responding to the Nargis disaster in Myanmar.

During the deployments of HAP and Sphere advisors, a large number of trainings and awareness raising events were held with participants from INGOs, NGOs, UN and government staff, both international and national. During this period, it was decided to put in a grant proposal for an Inter-agency Quality and Accountability Coordinator representing both HAP and Sphere, hosted by Save the Children. DFID agreed to fund this role from October 2008 to March 2009. A coordinator was recruited to fill this position but was able to

start only in mid- January 2009, though Save the Children agreed to cover the costs until the end of June to ensure the completion of the original project intent.

Early results from the HAP & Sphere collaboration:

Positive results arising out the early HAP and Sphere deployments were felt to be (by Sept 08):

- ✓ Agreements to work jointly between HAP & Sphere
- ✓ Support from Geneva on working modalities
- ✓ Availability of staff from both agencies
- ✓ Pre-deployment planning
- ✓ Working /building on work of NGO liaison person
- ✓ Sharing information
- ✓ Numbers of activities & agencies to target together
- ✓ Level of awareness & interest to improve quality and accountability

Initial challenges:

- Delays with visas for consultants
- Lack of clarity at beginning on who will lead on logistics and communications with Geneva & others
- Lack of integrated Terms of Reference
- Maintaining momentum of activities
- Lack of continuity of staff – with one exception,
- Lack of clarity with other stakeholders eg ICVA
- Determining roles for different managing agencies: who does what (eg. SCIM / HAP / Sphere)
- Pressure to deliver training vs other methods

Outputs:

Initial outputs (from July – December) were well received (see Evaluation of overall project for further details) and a wide range of trainings, briefings and presentations or awareness raising events were enabled through these deployments. Sphere trainings reached nearly 700 people from UN, INGOs, NGOs, Red Cross, Government agencies, both national and international involved in the response, including 27 trained trainers on Sphere. HAP reached at least 100 staff briefing people on HAP benchmarks, complaints mechanisms and investigations processes. Jointly there were at least 114 staff reached with many more through joint presentations to a number of Cluster groups which raised awareness both of the trainings being offered, but more importantly of the nature and relevance of quality and accountability standards in the Cyclone response. HAP staff also analyzed and documented some of the initial challenges facing specific agencies in the response and worked with some agencies, assessing their ability to set up accountability mechanisms.

The establishment of the **Accountability & Learning Working Group (ALWG)** in country provided an important forum for national and international staff from a wide variety of NGOs, INGOs and UN agencies to discuss issues of arising in the Nargis response of quality and accountability and share and find solutions together, with support and guidance from the NGO Liaison officer as well as the HAP & Sphere advisors.

There remained some challenges relating to these deployments and several suggestions were made for a future phase of the initiative.

Suggestions for joint deployments

- Clarity of roles and responsibilities between agencies
- Integrated TOR – agreed together
- Joint briefing and debriefing in Geneva
- Agreed communications strategy
- Agreement on outputs (reports) and strategies
- Support for logs, admin etc
- Links to INEE

As a result of these initial reflections, the project design attempted to reflect these initial issues.

Project Overview

Goal: Disaster affected populations benefit from quality humanitarian response that is accountable to them.

Aim: Humanitarian actors have the knowledge and capacity to implement quality programmes that are accountable to affected populations

To do this, 4 key areas of work were agreed & reflected in the Job Description of the Quality & Accountability Coordinator

1. **Provide agency-specific support:** To support participating organizations to improve their quality and accountability practices through the provision of tailor-made solutions, including agency-specific accompaniments
2. **Promote complementary approaches:** To support and build on current inter-agency operational approach to quality and accountability in Myanmar, which enables agencies to integrate HAP and Sphere across all programmes, as appropriate.
3. **Facilitate, document and share learning:** To facilitate sharing of good practice, tools and lessons learnt and prepare relevant documentation.
4. **Advocacy and collaboration:** to advocate and facilitate collaboration and integration between complementary initiatives (particularly the *INEE Minimum Standards*) with a view of improving the quality and accountability of humanitarian action in Myanmar

The original intent to develop a ‘core support group’ on accountability through the ALWG did not eventuate.

Human Resources & administrative support

The QAP team consisted of an internationally recruited Quality & Accountability Coordinator, and two local staff to work as Q&A officers. The Coordinator started in mid-January after a short briefing in Geneva by HAP & Sphere. The two national staff, appointed only in April 09, and were seconded from two of the participating agencies. Additional administrative support was provided by the Local Resource Centre where the Accountability staff were hosted, and Save the Children, to whom staff were officially contracted and lined managed by.

Identifying needs

The project was designed in consultation with Save the Children, HAP, Sphere, the NGO Liaison officer and the ALWG members, & DFID. When the coordinator arrived, there was a lack of clarity amongst some of the agencies interested in accountability support as to the nature of the support that could be provided and /or was wanted. Momentum had waned also in the interim. There was some sense that assistance was wanted but people were a bit reluctant, and in some cases, unable due to lack of understanding and clarity, to commit. Trust and relationship building with the new coordinator was needed. Staff of the NGOs and thus also of the ALWG had also changed in part, and organizations were also going through internal restructuring processes.

On arrival of the coordinator, a series of individual meetings with agency heads, emergency coordinators, members of the ALWG, cluster meetings etc were held to establish what was wanted and could possibly be provided. It was also clear that for many, the timing of the support was an issue with many preoccupied with transitioning their initial relief efforts into longer term transition programmes. This meant much of the intensive support for individual agencies only took place in the latter part of the project (April – June).



Su Mon, Quality & Accountability Officer talking with community member in Kyautan township, CRM training

Activities

- *ALWG meetings* - members discussed, shared information and learning about issues related to targeting, complaints and feedback, social auditing techniques, community groups, the Learning project, evaluations, monitoring challenges etc. (Facilitated by the QAP coordinator & LRC)
- *Cluster, ISAC and other meetings* – issues raised included complaints and feedback mechanisms, protection of staff (& beneficiaries), SEA etc.
- *Specific agency support* - a package of support provided to 8 agencies (Merlin, Mercy Corps, Save the Children, Oxfam, World Concern, WeltHungerHilfe, CAFOD/KMSS, & MERCY Malaysia) to help strengthen their understanding, analysis and ability to address accountability issues within their agencies. Training and support was provided to senior management and to specified staff on accountability, self assessment process, Sphere, and Complaints and Response handling. This took place between April- June (Merlin support was in March).
- *Translation & printing of materials* – a range of materials were translated and made available in English and Myanmar on HAP, Sphere, INEE, Code of Conduct, Good Enough Guide and general accountability.
- *Documenting lessons learnt* – several case studies and materials were developed and shared (SC information centers, MM self assessment process, SC's child friendly evaluation report processes etc).
- *Arranging trainings and support for other agencies (ACT members & partners, ACTED, Local Resource Centre, CBI, Tearfund, ASEAN, OCHA)* on accountability, Sphere, INEE trainings; Complaints and Response handling.
- *Appointment of Sphere focal point* – one of the Sphere TOTs agreed to act as Focal point for Myanmar, in May 09
- *Advocacy & networking* – this was largely done through the ALWG, the ISAC, INGO, ASEAN and cluster meetings & with individual meetings with donors, in collaboration with the NGO Liaison officer.

Management arrangements

Direct operational management was provided by the Director of Emergency, Save the Children. Technical support and guidance was provided through focal points at both HAP and Sphere in Geneva (formalized through MOUs). Twice monthly phone calls, monthly reports and 2 visits from the HAP staff (and one from a Sphere consultant) provided input and support to the project and to the Coordinator.

Funding and donor issues

The DFID grant period ran from October – March and could not be extended. It was later agreed to use the unused funds to cover Save the Children's WASH activities, and SC would cover the costs pertaining to the Q&A project until the end of June. It was envisaged that the Disaster Emergency Committee may be willing to support the project further and they eventually agreed to contribute some funds, but there seemed to be a misapprehension in the DEC that this effort was a solely Save the Children project and therefore not something they were willing to fund. Save the Children tried to convince them that this was an inter-agency initiative but the DEC was not willing to reconsider. This was possibly a missed opportunity for the DEC as many of the agencies working with the Q&A project are DEC members and this effort helps to strengthen the accountability processes DEC itself promotes.

Feedback from stakeholders

The feedback from stakeholders on the work has been largely positive, in terms of unpacking further the HAP & Sphere initiatives, and giving a greater understanding and practical ideas of 'how to do accountability'.

There is still much to do with regards to accountability but seeds were planted. Increased skills developed, knowledge of the individual standards, some understanding on how they complement each other, and some ideas & commitments towards taking the accountability agenda forward by individuals and by organizations happened. How this plays out throughout the humanitarian system more widely is a different question. It helped to 'demystify' the concept of accountability and firmly placed accountability on the agenda of the agencies and humanitarian sector but how high it is now placed on that agenda is perhaps harder to judge.

CASE STUDY: Merlin was chosen as one of the first agencies to go through a guided self assessment process. It had begun this process in late 2008, using knowledge and skills gained in earlier HAP training. It was supported in March to continue this process, with support from the Q&A Coordinator and the visiting HAP training Coordinator. Merlin has just formally become a member of HAP and the Cyclone Nargis response provided an opportunity to put some of this into practice.

At the end of the field visits and discussions with staff, this was the response by Merlin:

"The overall feedback from this self-assessment process has been positive from across the organisation. Whilst being time and resource intensive, the process also acted as a training and planning exercise, during which many staff were encouraged to practice new accountability concepts in their daily work. It also stressed the importance of accountability as an essential and cross-cutting issue, relevant to all areas of an organisation's operations." Isabelle Risso-Gill, Accountability focal point, Merlin, March 2009

Challenges:

There were some challenges in implementing the project:

- There was no clear joint vision from the two Initiatives of HAP & Sphere. This was the first time they had really worked together, and even after the initial deployments to Myanmar, there was still no real agreed joint approach, strategy or materials agreed.
- It has not always clear or easy for the Coordinator to respond to the different demands and expectations of the different stakeholders, notably Sphere, HAP (and to a lesser degree INEE) in addition to the in-country stakeholders (agencies, clusters etc) given their varying approaches. It was sometimes not clear who could 'set' the agenda and when to push and when to let things develop more organically.
- It was difficult to get local NGO engagement, particularly at the beginning, especially without local staff assistance. With the later involvement and engagement of the LRC, it became clearer that they would be better placed to engage more with local civil society
- Getting agency senior management engagement although there was often a general agreement, when pinning people down to specific activities or dates, management shied away from full commitment. This seem to be because they wanted to know more about what was on offer and the implications and also a sense that this wasn't seen as a priority for them and more for 'implementers'. It was notable that once managers had the training, most quickly appreciate its relevance and benefits for the organizations. In many cases, HAP members had not always been clearly informed by their own HQs as to the implications of being a HAP member – the training helped to put this into perspective.
- Choosing the right people for any of the trainings was difficult, even when clear criteria and objectives for training was set. Often agency management didn't necessarily consider carefully who would be the best people to send to training either based on their roles, abilities or interests. More needs to be done to try and get management to consider the investment they are making when they are sending people to training.
- The lack of direct Sphere Secretariat visits to the country during the past 12 months will potentially limit Sphere's ability so people on the ground know who and how to relate to the Project in the future. The support by consultants while valued is limited to the lifespan of the project. The appointment of the Sphere focal point will enable some future engagement on Sphere in country, but will be dependent on the time and effort the focal point can give and the support they receive from other trainers and from the Sphere Secretariat.
- The visits by the HAP staff (particularly those that came more than once) & engagement with local stakeholders in Myanmar allowed for greater understanding of context and the issues facing members. This will potentially allow for more focused future support either directly or, for

members, through their respective headquarters. But there is an issue about the level of support available to non-members, and it would be pity to lose the momentum created with these agencies

- The initial Q&A project envisaged starting by October. Recruitment was delayed and interviews held only in November, with the chosen candidate only available in January. Though the project was able to fulfill the original six months, momentum was lost to a degree as a result of the delays in the recruitment process. On the positive side, it did mean that the timing of the support provided coincided with may agencies' transitions processes and this was often advantageous as they had the interest and time to engage in the initiative in tandem with these processes.
- The two officers should also have been recruited to start by January but again, despite job descriptions being completed by December, no advertising or interviews were held and it was not until the Coordinator was in post that any action was taken. As such, they did not start until early April having only 3 months to get up to speed. Due to the delays it was decided to go for secondment options for staff and this proved to be an important decision as it allowed for the capacity to be retained by at least 2 of the agencies involved in the project.
- Finding the right people to translate and managing the translation processes was a challenge due to the level of translators available, their understanding of the topic and their ability to find the right ways to translate them.
- The context was challenging, in terms the level of understanding & experience in country of some of the humanitarian principles, attitudes to information sharing and participation. Adapting the support was important to ensure it was contextually important.
- In addition, the ability to travel (due to visa and bureaucratic travel authority processes) meant that it was not possible for the international coordinator to travel easily and arrange support and training in the field.



CRM training, Yangon, May 2009

Lessons Learnt:

General

- ✓ Many preferred continuity of personnel to a series of different consultants coming in and out in relatively quick succession. This would also allow for the people to understand the situation better and better able to contextualise the support needed in the given situation.
- ✓ There was a need for support both in the immediate aftermath of the emergency as well as later on in the recovery process, and on-going in terms of preparedness and this support needs to be targeted in different ways. It is useful in the immediate aftermath to remind people & agencies of standards and processes relating to accountability and build awareness. It is useful later to have more capacity building support. In preparedness, there is much agencies can do to strengthen their accountability systems and staff capacities before the onset of an emergency. It is still challenging to look at how the humanitarian system as a whole can really set up improved processes that address accountability more systematically.

ALWG

- ✓ Utilising the ALWG to facilitate the project in terms of quality and accountability was good but important to keep it as a separate entity in its own right. Had it been seen and used solely for the QAP project it would have lost some of its own integrity and relevance.
- ✓ The ALWG or similar can play a useful role in providing a forum for sharing learning and best practices around accountability and provide peer support. It does not necessarily have (or need to have) the same function as a regular 'cluster'.
- ✓ The role of the QAP coordinator and the NGO liaison coordinator can play complementary roles but it is important to keep the coordination function and the capacity building function separate in a response.

Working jointly with HAP and Sphere (& INEE)

- ✓ This joint approach was useful in creating a greater understanding of accountability that was more than just numbers (Sphere) or bureaucracy (HAP) and more about what accountability meant in practice. However, more needed to be done to get people to see the principles (the why it is important for the way we work) which had started to happen but not in all cases and is needed to ensure sustainability. This was in part a reflection of both the training provided and the lack of joint training materials and approach.
- ✓ HAP and Sphere need to agree more clearly their modalities around training and develop a common vision on how things will work and the principles behind both initiatives to facilitate greater understanding. This also needs to be reflected in the expectations and guidance provided to the QAP team so an agreed joint approach

that is not just about either HAP or Sphere but about the promotion of accountability.

- ✓ The appointment of the Sphere focal point should be agreed early on to allow for greater chance for it to be developed and supported throughout the project.

Sphere training for the 8 agencies: May 2009



Individual agencies

- ✓ It is essential to work at different levels of organisations, in particular, to work with management of the country office (not just with the humanitarian teams) and to look at ways to link up with work at the headquarters of INGOs. It is important to get agencies to see accountability as relevant to their overall operation and not just to their emergency programmes.
- ✓ Developing a peer or informal network of accountability people across agencies is useful to provide mutual support and advice and this should be encouraged from the outset to strengthen the process.
- ✓ Agencies need to recognise accountability is a management function as well as an operational function and prioritise it, devoting higher calibre staff and at higher management levels to the processes.
- ✓ HQs of larger INGOs should look at providing accountability support from the outset of an emergency (through the provision of appropriately trained and designated staff) as well as reviewing contingency plans of organisations and country programmes to ensure accountability is built into SOPs and other organisational procedures and programme approaches.
- ✓ Agencies should include utilise funding lines in donor proposals to resource accountability mechanisms.
- ✓ Build into DRR work quality and accountability approaches.

Save the Children / Managing or host organisation

- ✓ Having a large agency, such as Save the Children, to support this initiative sends a strong message of leadership and commitment to others for strengthening accountability. Other agencies should be encouraged to take on such projects in the future to strengthen local and international civil society.

- ✓ The managing agency should appoint a focal person to take forward actions relating to developing the proposal/concept note and for the modalities, recruitment, budget developed in more detail. It is difficult for outside consultants or HAP or Sphere to take on this role.
- ✓ Consider seconding local staff from interested agencies as this will help to generate buy in from those agencies, strengthen in-house capacity and provide on-going inter-agency capacity.
- ✓ The international post should be a management level post, to attract the right level of qualified candidates, with the range of skills and experience needed.
- ✓ Where possible also pitch the national posts at a higher level (grade, pay and level of experience), and negotiate with their agency so they return to the appropriate role with their own agencies after the secondment period.
- ✓ Working with agencies such as the LRC is useful especially for continuing & strengthening the work with local civil society and providing in-country capacity and leadership.

DFID

- ✓ Regular interactions with the donor staff was invaluable, but encourage donors to facilitate meetings with managers of participating agencies to discuss barriers or concerns relating to donor attitudes to funding and supporting accountability processes, bringing other donors into this discussion. Many agency staff still believe donors are not interested in accountability; and in some cases donors are not always clear about how to support agencies strengthen their accountability practices. A meeting of donors & agency staff to look these issues would help to incorporate accountability approaches into donor proposals, monitoring missions and other mechanisms.
- ✓ Donors should consider an investment of sustained support over a minimum of 12 months on accountability. This would allow for agencies & initiatives (such as HAP & Sphere) to recruit, plan and contextualise their support to an emergency better. Also consider planning (& funding) for on-going intermittent support to embed accountability in agencies' & the humanitarian systems processes through longer term programmes, preparedness and DRR activities.
- ✓ Identify ways to further strengthen local civil society efforts over the longer term on accountability.

In the recent evaluation, "most respondents said when I asked if the joint initiative of HAP and Sphere was useful and if there was added value in bringing HAP and Sphere together [they responded]: "Absolutely, unequivocally yes!"

Silva Ferretti, external evaluator of the DFID funded inter-agency quality and accountability project June 2009

Conclusions

It is not feasible to look just at the last 6 months or even the last 12 months of HAP and Sphere support and come to any clear conclusions about the impact of this work on the quality of the aid being provided by the agencies in the Nargis response or whether they have changed practices as a direct result of this support. It is significant that as a result of the combined activities of the ALWG, the HAP, Sphere and INEE support, the Learning Project and other initiatives, accountability is higher on the agenda of most agencies and coordination and learning mechanisms, across the Cyclone Nargis response, and people are also beginning to consider how to use this work for their on-going developmental programmes.

The expectations of what could be achieved through this project were high and at times overwhelmingly so and a tendency to see what could be 'delivered' by the project rather than what individuals or agencies are responsible to take forward the learning, trainings and discussions back into their own organisations. Individuals often came with limited understanding of the role they could play within their organisations through participating in the project; managers did not really brief or support individuals to do this either. This limited the impact that could have been gained had this project been seen as something to engage with rather than something to receive training from.

Many stakeholders have indicated that they would like some continued support. It is hoped that even without the dedicated support, agencies will have some ability to continue to strengthen their quality and accountability mechanisms. At the end of the day, agencies need and should take on the responsibility for themselves to strengthen their accountability systems. There are also possibilities, especially for HAP members and those interested in supporting Sphere, to continue to receive support. And donors remain interested to support the work, if this can be built into larger proposals, rather than as a stand-alone initiative.

Through the ALWG it is hoped that staff from the participating agencies, plus others will continue to use the ALWG as an opportunity to share and discuss issues and challenges relating to quality programming and accountability mechanisms. In the last month, it has been agreed to reduce the frequency of the meetings to once a month and to hold these largely in Myanmar language. It is also envisaged that the monthly meetings will focus on a particular topic area, with members taking turns to facilitate and bring to the meetings examples or questions on the topics to discuss in some depth. It has also been agreed to form an ALWG Steering Committee with managers from LRC and 5 other agencies to provide overall leadership and guidance of the group. Efforts to encourage greater involvement and

contributions from local NGO members are also happening. The project participating agencies are now keen to use the ALWG to sustain their own efforts and use it to inform other staff of the issues and suggestions arising out of the meetings.

One key area is on the area of working with community based groups. The Best Practice Review document (once completed) will provide a framework to bring stakeholders and interested parties together to agree ways to inform and improve their own agencies' practices working in communities.

Individual agencies including the eight which have received specific support, ACT members and partners and ACTED, amongst others (including CARE, Action Aid and World Vision as committed organisations with dedicated accountability staff and systems) are in a better position to take forward some actions to strengthening their accountability systems. Those that have gone through the accompaniment process are completing their self assessment processes. They should be using these findings to inform the development of their accountability strategies and accountability action plans for their on-going Cyclone response and to strengthen their overall organisational (in-country and potentially global) accountability systems (especially in relation to future emergency responses). The informal network of staff which has developed through the process should be encouraged by their senior managers, to continue to support each other. HAP members working directly in-country or those supporting international and local partners should also continue to support efforts on accountability, with support from the HAP secretariat and their own HQs.

The two seconded staff will return to their own agencies in July. The one from Save the Children will take up the post of accountability officer, with a particular focus on their information centres aspect of accountability. The one from Mercy Corps will take up the post of design, monitoring and evaluation officer, including accountability, so will continue to play key roles. They have developed some training skills but these need further development. They could support others to deliver training and are keen and enthusiastic to do so, in conjunction with others, within their own agencies and in other agencies and are well placed to do so.

The learning project (based within Save the Children) provides another way to build and strengthen understanding of general humanitarian practices and accountability. Staff from the individual agencies as well as others involved in the ALWG, should be encouraged to do this training to help to build their individual and their organisational understanding and awareness of accountability. The LP should also be encouraged to share issues and challenges with the ALWG.

The Local Resource Centre has been involved in a variety of ways in the HAP/Sphere support from the outset. They can and will continue to play a key role in strengthening accountability in the humanitarian sector/ civil society in Myanmar in a variety of ways. Several staff have good understanding and awareness of quality and accountability issues. For the LRC itself, it has decided to develop its own accountability strategy and action plan, including looking at how it manages complaints from its stakeholders. It is also planning to continue to play a role in supporting the ALWG, and to continue to feed into the group as well seek ideas and involvement of the group in research areas. It is also keen, through the Monitoring and Accountability officer, to find ways to support local NGOs to strengthen their accountability practices, using some of the techniques and ideas gained through the interaction with the QAP work. They will also continue to disseminate materials on quality and accountability and to work with others (eg. Sphere focal points, INEE focal points and the others involved in the accountability 'network') on accountability issues and to link people up where feasible for future training and support opportunities.



Community consultations in Kyautan township

The Sphere focal point and the TOTs will hopefully work more closely together to provide some training & support especially for local NGOs on Sphere and consultation opportunities on the Sphere revision process. They will try to also link up with the ALWG, the individual agencies' 'network', the Local Resource Centre and the INEE focal point where possible.

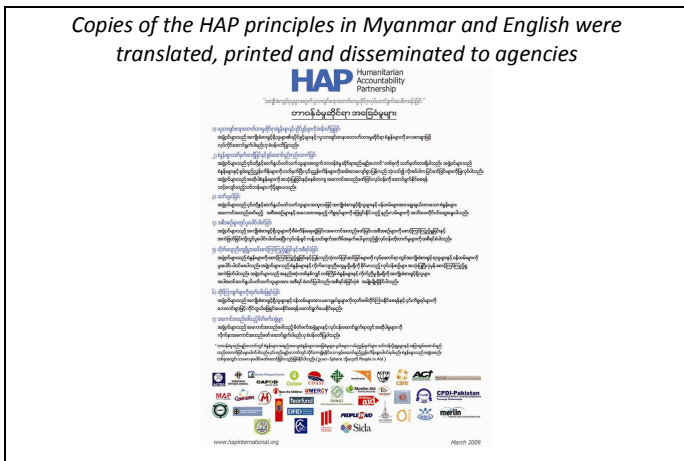
The focal point for INEE within Save the Children has already provided training in June and has plans for further training for later on in the year. The focal point will also try to link up with interested agencies and will be in touch with the Sphere focal point to identify ways to support each other further.

HAP & Sphere Secretariats: This joint work together in Myanmar was welcomed by most stakeholders. It demonstrated to aid agencies that they were being listened to rather than being dictated to. Many comments were made about how this allowed them to think about accountability rather than about different initiatives they were unsure either how they fitted together, or whether it was yet another thing to worry about – the next ‘big idea’. There is an impression that there are too many accountability initiatives about and it is not clear how they are going to help as opposed to hinder emergency operations. While this project helped to challenge these perceptions, HAP, Sphere and other initiatives still need to work out better how best to really position the initiatives, jointly and/or separately if they want to bring about a shift in the humanitarian sectors attitude and practice on accountability. In choosing people to jointly represent them, they need to provide greater clarity and support to them, and where possible more briefing, and see this role as just as much a priority as other work they have.

was indicative that when certification or compliance issues entered the discussions, managers in particular, were often defensive. Finding the right times to use the leverage of the ‘stick’ of compliance or regulation can bring alongside the ‘carrot’ of capacity building was difficult one to judge.

UN and other agencies & cluster system – The cluster system in Myanmar will be phased out soon and will be replaced by another coordination mechanism, under the PONREPP. Though some officers received training, it has not been possible for much to be reflected in the overall system or processes of the UN, ASEAN or humanitarian system as a whole, or in Myanmar. As a new ‘player’ in the humanitarian sector, it will be worth ASEAN reflecting on its experience in Myanmar and consider investing further, particularly in relation to accountability as there was limited (with one or two exceptions) understanding of their role as a humanitarian actor and the responsibilities that entails.

It would be useful for donors, individual agencies and members of ISAC or other bodies to consider ways to further promote accountability especially to communities, either with support or involvement of initiatives such as HAP and/or Sphere or through other work. Many more agencies in Myanmar are better placed now to do this, and the ALWG can continue to play a role in this effort, but it will be up to the individual agencies themselves and their staff to commit to doing this. And if accountability is to be more fully reflected in the humanitarian system, more work still needs to be done to ensure this is facilitated and put on the agenda of future emergencies. This remains a significant challenge for everyone concerned. There is a need for more concerted efforts to do so, but this experience demonstrates that it is possible to make a difference, though some further thought needs to go into options for future modalities of support and approaches of different actors, to meet the changing needs and the different contexts at all stages of an emergency and transition towards to longer term responses.



Concept of ‘inter-agency’, its limitations and possibilities: As an inter-agency project there are endless ways to interpret it. For some it took on a sense of sharing (e.g. through the ALWG) and a way to be together with others. For others the possibility to support each other as individuals doing the same thing, struggling with the same challenges, having that peer support was attractive. But the challenge was still how to take that learning back to management, particularly if the individuals themselves lacked experience and confidence and where managers had ‘tasked’ individuals with accountability without fully recognizing their own responsibilities in supporting the process. There was also the issue of trust, agencies needed to be confident in the individuals attached to the Q&A project as well as in the process and the interactions between different agencies would be a one of mutual learning not of competitiveness. They also had to trust that the approach to accountability was one of capacity building rather than one of compliance and certification. It



Mercy Malaysia's community information boards