

Speaking notes: DFID Humanitarian Partners Meeting

Humanitarian Accountability

Accountability is the responsible use of power – it is to take account of, and to give account to stakeholders for decisions and actions.

Why does it matter? –

1. because of the extreme asymmetry of the “giver-receiver” relationship in the international aid system
2. because of the weakness or lack of state regulation
3. because of the current weakness of self-regulatory mechanisms both for individual humanitarian workers and for humanitarian agencies
4. because of the observed consequences:
 - a. cases of egregious sexual exploitation and abuse
 - b. waste and inefficiency
 - c. opportunity costs – i.e. preventable mortality, morbidity and suffering
5. Finally because it is wrong for agencies founded upon a proposition of human dignity to not operationalise respect for dignity and the right to be heard

How can the accountability deficit be addressed?

1. through state regulation – unlikely and perhaps undesirable
2. through donor conditionality – likely, but undesirable (make matters even more asymmetrical)
3. through self-regulation – by definition inconsistent, confusing
4. through collective voluntary self-regulation (what might also be called professionalisation – in the Weberian sense)

I have long believed that the latter approach is the most promising one. It works well in many other sectors. It is probably the only realistic option anyway in the humanitarian aid system. It is essentially a market based strategy – strengthening the link between programme quality and the attractiveness of an agency’s brand.

- HAP was founded as a collective voluntary self-regulatory body with a mission to make humanitarian action more accountable to disaster survivors.
- It began with 8 members in December 2003 and it now has 21.
- Members commit to complying with the HAP Principles of Accountability and are required to report annually on their progress in implementing their Accountability Workplan.
- The HAP Secretariat is mandated to monitor compliance with the accountability principles and to “accredit its members accordingly”.
- In January 2007 it adopted the HAP Standard in Humanitarian Accountability and Quality Management to enable the Secretariat to make fair and consistent judgements about compliance.
- The Standard was designed by aid workers and disaster survivors through a selection process that included only management practices that are “mission critical”, affordable and measurable. This is the only aid standard developed in this way and which meets the ISO guidelines for designing quality standards. The HAP Standard is very similar in substance to the ISO 9000 quality assurance standard.
- In April 2007 the first two members were certified as compliant with the HAP Standard. A third has achieved certification this month. Two more have fixed

dates for audits. A further ten or so agencies are at various stages of the baseline analysis process.

Nicholas Stockton

30 January 2008