

The Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies

Final Submission

To the Independent Humanitarian Emergency Response Review

23rd December 2010

A - Introduction

The CBHA respects the foresight and courage of Secretary of State Andrew Mitchell in commissioning an independent review of the UK's humanitarian work. The CBHA also appreciates the willingness of the HERR team to listen to a very broad set of views, and in particular to allocate significant resources to engage with the fifteen members of the CBHA¹. It is important to recognise that CBHA members have made robust bilateral submissions to the HERR, based on many years' engagement in humanitarian action. While the CBHA is a diverse Consortium, all members respect the experience, knowledge and policies of the other members. This submission therefore aspires to add a different perspective to those submissions by articulating a nascent vision for the future of the CBHA-DFID relationship. This submission is also a contribution to thinking about maximising DFID impact in influencing the international humanitarian system. This submission asserts that while the world is undergoing a destabilising transition, DFID and NGOs have at their immediate disposal considerable power and ability to promote better humanitarian outcomes for crisis-affected populations around the world.

B – Context: emerging potential of the Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies

The CBHA has been enabled by a contemporary recognition in British NGOs that rapid transformation is required. These 15 organisations embrace the network paradigm of the age, and seek to maximise the potential of a complex network of civil society relationships that transcend traditional political boundaries. The CBHA is a new form of virtual organisation consisting of an astonishing array of several thousand organisational relationships that offers great potential in scaling up to the challenges of the age. At minimum the pathways in this network offer a rapid and highly efficient method of getting resources to the front line of humanitarian action in the most vulnerable areas of the world. The CBHA directly addresses long-term NGO weaknesses while increasing its capacity: in human resource systems, in the ability to adopt technological innovations and tools, and in how NGOs collaborate with each other.

The evidence emerging from CBHA performance suggests that this Consortium adds value in seven principle ways.

- First, a single contractual line between DFID and the CBHA reduces DFID transaction costs. This is not to say that collaboration comes without cost. Rather, this to suggest that transaction costs are downloaded to the CBHA and that the CBHA model may improve overall cost efficiency.
- Second, the peer review method of allocating CBHA resources ensures impartiality, appropriateness, and drives up the performance level of all members. Furthermore, CBHA allocation processes are highly transparent.
- Third, the CBHA model is promoting knowledge exchange and resource sharing between member agencies. This will increase the capacity of the NGO sector.
- Fourth, the CBHA model of resource allocation avoids overlaps.
- Fifth, the CBHA programme of work promotes coherence between longer-term capacity building issues and first-phase response work. These benefits can emerge at any level: local, regional or international. Last month, the pre-existing legal framework of the CBHA enabled the rapid formation of a consortium of six members in Pakistan funded with £20 million from DFID for early recovery work.
- Sixth, the CBHA has served as a potential focal point for NGO engagement. For example, the CBHA engagement in the HERR process offers potential efficiencies to DFID.
- Finally, the CBHA is enabling an increased capacity and contribution from national partner agencies.

In the eight months of its existence, the CBHA has launched 10 emergency alerts, five crisis-specific conference calls between 15 NGOs, and has funded 22 projects (out of 33 proposals) in 48hrs of the alert being issued in Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan and Myanmar. This is a considerable increase in the speed of funding. Apart from funding emergency

¹ The consortium consists of fifteen leading UK NGO's (Action Aid, Action Against Hunger, CAFOD, CARE, Concern, Christian Aid, Help Age, International Rescue Committee (IRC), Islamic Relief (IRW), Merlin, Oxfam, Plan, Save the Children, Tearfund and World Vision.

responses, CBHA is also working to build and improve members' capacity to respond to emergencies by introducing human resource policy alignment across its membership, conducting competence-based leadership and management training, and improving logistics supply chains by investing in new technology. That said, the evidence is not yet conclusive, and the potential of the CBHA in this area is yet to be realised. There is a strong track record to date, and there are potential mutual benefits for both CBHA agencies and DFID in investing further in this relationship.

C – Context: creating a resilient 21st Century international humanitarian system

The CBHA is acutely aware of the shifts in global human vulnerability and uncertainty about how to manage global-scale risks of the current era. This year's two mega-crises in Haiti and Pakistan can be seen not as aberrations, but leading indicators of the types of crises to which the international humanitarian system will respond. The system has not been able to scale up adequately to the humanitarian needs generated by these two crises because of the way it currently operates. The turbulence in international relations and humanitarian action will continue. Consequently, we must think differently.

Fresh thinking must begin with recognition that the scale and diversity of threats requires an exponential increase in the capacity and effectiveness of the international humanitarian system. Capacity implies an ability to deliver considerably greater quantities of humanitarian aid. This means using existing capacity effectively, and it means finding additional capacity. All potential resources must be considered: national emergency management structures, military forces, civil defence organisations, commercial corporations, the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, the United Nations, and the network of formal and informal national and international civil society organisations and movements. As a consequence, traditional humanitarian organisations must embrace the challenges and paradoxes of collaborating with non-traditional partners. Capacity also implies the ability to deliver humanitarian aid of appropriate quality. A complex international humanitarian system that delivers effective assistance in a complex world requires intelligent and professional actors. Leadership and co-ordination must be understood as evolving concepts. Yet at the same time Humanitarian Principles remain fundamentally important. Humanitarian Principles are the framework against which to understand and evaluate the actions of individuals, organisations, non-state actors and governments.

Fresh and clear thinking is needed to ensure that a resilient international humanitarian system emerges that is able to respond to the challenges of the age. The British Government must embrace the inconvenient truth that humanitarian crises will feature more prominently in the minds of the British public and within international relations. Humanitarian action must be a core task of DFID. DFID must try to influence each part of the system to contribute an appropriate and cost-effective role. Value for money in humanitarian action should be calculated on three equally important principles: timeliness, appropriateness, and whether it meets needs *that are defined by the crisis-affected population*. This also includes the needs of populations affected by 'invisible' crises for which no international response is provided. In order for the humanitarian system to impartially assess where the needs are greatest, much stronger needs assessment and monitoring and coordination capacity will be required. In this and other ways, non-traditional members of a new humanitarian system can learn from traditional members. At the same time, the role and contribution of traditional humanitarian organisations may have to evolve.

Courageous thinking will be required to promote an evolution in organisational behaviour within the traditional humanitarian system. The response to this year's Pakistan floods offers insight into the high levels of resources that are being consumed by the humanitarian system in internal co-ordination and management, while the overall response is yet to meet the needs of the 20 Million people affected. While some system-level co-ordination and management is necessary, current levels across the system are excessive due to three factors. First, a 20th Century bureaucratic industrial organisational model in the United Nations promotes vertical specialisations and single-sector perspectives that provide a limited understanding of problems affecting crisis-affected populations. The same model promotes anachronistic administrative procedures in the UN which seem deeply entrenched. Second, there is an emphasis on organisational mandates in the United Nations bureaucratic culture that reinforces wasteful competition for resources and space. Third, donor agencies cling to outdated and increasingly discredited industrial management frameworks, such as the linear cause and effect paradigm that supports Results-Based-Management. Results-measurement is useful when informed by beneficiary experience and perspectives, but current practice seems to have a bias toward less ambiguous and quantitative information. Consequently, humanitarian system co-ordination can be idiosyncratic – based largely on the personalities of the individuals in leadership positions in any single crisis. As front-line agencies, CBHA members believe that some of the existing process level resources should be reallocated to prioritise collaboration with local communities, and others reallocated to delivery.

D - The role of DFID

The CBHA suggests that DFID should reassert itself as a leading contributor to the international humanitarian system. The CBHA agencies have long admired and benefitted from a far-sighted and collaborative Department for International Development. This suggestion pragmatically acknowledges the reality that as a major donor, DFID has unique moral and financial abilities to influence how the system operates. Morally, DFID can give confidence to agents of change as they struggle with the ambiguities and ambivalences of challenging the status quo. DFID can also promote respect for the essential neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian action. Financially, DFID can support bold experiments, and withdraw support from things that don't work. Moreover, DFID is uniquely placed to broker knowledge exchange between centres of domestic expertise and vulnerable communities.

The CBHA suggests that DFID activities in the humanitarian domain prioritise two types of activities: those that enable a well-functioning and scalable international humanitarian system to emerge, and those that enable community-level resilience around the world. DFID can begin by demonstrating that considerable efficiencies can be obtained by reducing bureaucracy to a minimum. Contemporary methods of accountability are needed - that embrace the complexity of the 21st Century. We can begin to situate quantitative measurement as a limited contribution to analysing and understanding the turbulence and uncertainties that are inherent in humanitarian crises. The effectiveness of DFID funding will be considerably increased with more trust and meaningful accountability in its institutional relationships. It would be illustrative to compare this call for releasing aid workers from outdated bureaucracy to the call for releasing front-line police officers from paperwork. DFID staff could be much more involved in how international humanitarian institutions operate, and that involvement will make a meaningful contribution if it is less report-based, and more relationship-based.

We must all embrace new ways of working. For example, the operational capacity of the CHASE Operations Team offers a tremendous asset to the humanitarian system that CBHA believes should be maintained. At the same time, the type of operational support from the OT may have to evolve. The need for transformation in the international humanitarian system is great, and DFID as a major donor has the ability to influence this transformation. It seems reasonable to suggest that OT staff become involved in how those changes are taking place – by establishing collaborative relationships with highly connected nodes and promising organisational developments. The CBHA, the West Africa Humanitarian Response Fund (WAHRF), and the humanitarian Program Partnership Agreements (PPA) are all good examples of an increased emphasis on using relationships, more than reports, to influence positive change. Alternatively, DFID's humanitarian experts could be deployed in longer-term assignments across a range of humanitarian organisations.

DFID can set an example of enlightened and innovative humanitarian donor behaviour. Predictable funding is needed to arrive at the right place at the right time. The CBHA is an example of an alternative financial model that offers promise in delivering rapid funds to the front line of humanitarian action at low cost. To ensure this alternative model is fully explored, DFID should drop "increased percentage of global humanitarian financing committed through pooled funding mechanisms" as an indicator of success (DSO Indicator 3.4). Moreover, funding can be expanded for activities at global, regional and national level in advance of emerging new humanitarian crises. This will require more donor collaboration, not simply in promoting the principles of *Good Humanitarian Donorship*, but in ensuring that traditional and non-traditional donors invest in alternative financial models that deliver results. A resilient humanitarian system that can respond to the challenges of the age must have several financial pathways. This should include bilateral relationships, multilateral pooled funds, and newly emerging models such as the CBHA.

E – The role of the UN

This submission asserts that the United Nations is a fundamental humanitarian actor, and that its role in humanitarian action must evolve. CBHA agencies require an environment in which the UN provides appropriate leadership and appropriate strategy. Donors must continue to invest in UN capacities to provide leadership and strategy. The 2003 Humanitarian Reform process resulted in several useful initiatives. For example, the cluster system is successfully providing sector-level co-ordination, improving sector-specific capacity and possibly improving impact to crisis-affected populations. Yet, clusters are not working well as 'providers of last resort', or as funding channels. National level pooled funding channels largely do not produce results for NGOs, and local NGOs are almost completely excluded. The weaknesses in these mechanisms as funding channels are a result of two factors: UN administrative systems, and the time required to participate in meetings, which favour larger organisations. The role of the UN can evolve such that it enables the work of operational front-line organisations. CBHA agencies require UN leadership to be more predictable, to have a robust ability to create enabling environments for operational humanitarian work, and

to have a clearer remit for co-ordination and advocacy. More separation is required between co-ordination and delivery. Inter-cluster co-ordination and integration must be improved. The Humanitarian Country Team needs to be strengthened to act as strategic, policy and agenda setting bodies and be more representative of the increasing variety in humanitarian actors, with a strong role for national and international humanitarian NGOs.

F – The role of NGOs

If we are to meet the challenges of the age, the contribution to humanitarian action by the third pillar must increase. NGOs have important relationships with local communities, a natural understanding of local context, and a focus on operational delivery. Humanitarian principles are the driving force for NGOs in humanitarian crises. The non-reciprocal nature of these principles is a distinguishing strength of NGOs compared to non-traditional actors. The vast network of local organisations with established relationships with CBHA agencies offers a powerful counter-argument to the view that humanitarian action is a predominately Western project. Yet there are problems in NGO co-ordination, capacity, and competition. There are many civil society organisations in humanitarian action, and it is difficult for other actors in the system to effectively engage with NGOs. Many of the larger international organisations have attained the size at which creeping bureaucratisation begins to influence their performance. It can be expensive and cumbersome to mobilise large numbers of NGOs in response to a crisis. Consequently, at the same time as seeking to enable their increased contribution to humanitarian action, civil society actors must address their weaknesses. The CBHA welcomes thoughtful and evidence-based DFID action to help its agencies improve themselves and their impact on crisis-affected populations. Equally however, in order to live up to their potential, NGOs require fast and efficient funding. To ensure this potential contribution to effective utilisation of humanitarian funding, a transfer of decision-making to NGOs is required.

G – The future of the DFID-CBHA relationship

The CBHA believes its full potential, which draws on the strength, reach and experience of fifteen leading NGOs, cannot be explored without more resources at its disposal. The CBHA Emergency Response Fund (ERF) for example could more effectively address forgotten crises, chronic emergencies, sudden shifts in ongoing crises, and small-scale localised climate related disasters. Unfortunately the ERF, at £2 Million per year, is too small in size to effectively address these types of crises. Last month, the small size of ERF funds prevented the CBHA from taking a meaningful response to the Haiti cholera outbreak.

The CBHA ERF could promote the emergence of an NGO version of the UN CERF, although this would require funding in the order of £100 Million per year. This amount of annual funding will have implications in several dimensions. It would enable proactive NGO humanitarian action in the types of crises previously identified. It would enable DIFD staff to take on a more proactive role in influencing and supporting the humanitarian system. It would enable change and innovation to occur in NGO humanitarian programming and improve relationships between the British NGO offices and their partners. Moreover, it would enable increased funding to national and local NGOs, something that is recognised as key across the humanitarian community but consistently fails to be addressed. The CBHA processes of transparent decision-making, internal reporting and annual reporting to DFID streamlines the funding process and reduces paperwork. The CBHA believes it can increase speed, transparency, co-ordination, information sharing, and it can address the humanitarian imperative in ways that DFID alone cannot.

Finally, the CBHA would hope for a strategic mature partnership with DFID. The CBHA is a pragmatic group that would prefer to have the encouragement to focus on the priorities, and the space to debate what the priorities are. It is hoped therefore that the CBHA-DIFD relationship in the future will be a critical friendship with frequent dialogue, transparency and mutual accountability.

END OF SUBMISSION