

CAN PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN NGO AND DONORS STRENGTHEN QUALITY OF HUMANITARIAN AID

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If a subject has been covered extensively over the last few years, it is the one of the relations between States and NGO. On that subject there are two strong and antagonistic Schools of the Thought.

- The first one is strongly opposed to even the ideas of an NGO-State partnership, seen as the source of all the evils, allegiances, loss of independence.
- The other accepts, if not promote the transformation of NGO in mere "implementing partners: cheap labour ready to go where requested or encourage to go by Donor States through the means of resource allocation and orientation.

Of course there is little common ground for debate between these two groups. There is another one, nevertheless, which looks a bit more constructively into this matter. This group bases its approach on the concept of a multi-stakeholder chain of solidarity where the key dynamic and ethical element is the perception of a double responsibility :

- responsibility towards the populations for whom we work and in the name of whom we mobilise resources;
- responsibility towards the citizens who, as tax payers or individual donors, enable us to work.

It might be here worth restating what a partnership is : it is a balanced relationship between "relatively equal partners" which allocates to each and every partners rights, duties and responsibility. In relation to our subject, a double entry grid can provide for a bit of clarification.

	Donors	NGO
Role	Political management Bring peace	Assist, protect and, for certain actors, bear witness
Duty	Make resources available Respect and ensure respect of	Use these resources in the most appropriate, efficient, effective and transparent manner

	IHL	
Rights	Ask for proper reporting Control Make choice	Not to be shot at Obtain access Obtain resources Make independent and impartial choice
Responsibility	Promote quality and support efforts towards that direction Control of the use of the means made available	Respect principles Mobilise enough means (financial, Human resources, etc.) Proper accountability

It might be equally useful to attempt to clarify what "quality" is, or at least to formulate the different definitions given to this concept: Is quality the result of the best adaptation to needs (impact) ? Is quality to result of the best fulfilment of a contract (realisation of objectives) ? Is quality the compliance with pre-defined standards ? Are we talking of the quality of an action or the quality of the management ? Or is simply quality the last fashionable concept in the humanitarian world ? Here again, there are effectively different approaches : pro SPHERE, anti-SPHERE, do not care about it, somewhere else ? The only common characteristics that can be extracted from all these approaches is that :

- quality takes time;
- quality has a cost;
- quality is a concept that destabilises;
- quality requires a pro-active strategy "Mieux vaut penser le changement que changer le pansement ».

But the analysis of a series of field case studies brings an interesting shade on the subject :

Afghanistan prior to September 11: As a result of an dialogue between the teams of ECHO and of the DG RELEX, good complementarities were established between two financial instruments, thus enabling the NGO to direct their request towards the most appropriate EU budget line. Here is the key word is COHERENCE.

Central America after Mitch and the san Salvadorian earthquakes : It appeared that the emergency funds and the attached procedures were not appropriate for reconstruction efforts. Indeed human settlements are not just a sum of shelters but location for intra-and inter family relations and socially constructed groups. Dealing with these contexts requires methods and timeframe which do not enter nicely within emergency budget lines. Here the issue is the APPROPRIATENESS OF THE INSTRUMENTS;

Angola during the UNITA/Government negotiations in 1994 : There was a UN/Donors tendency to establish an embargo against UNITA and to prevent food aid to reach the Huambo area. A strong ICRC/NGO lobby had to be launched in order to reverse this strategy.

The question at stake is "THE INTER-RELATIONS BETWEEN HUMANITARIANISM AND POLITICS".

Albania during the influx of Kosovar refugees : This was a bit a nightmare. The increased bilateralism weakened UNHCR. The militaries wanted to become prominent humanitarian actors despite the fact that they were one of the parties to the conflict. Most of the Kosovar refugees were hosted by families or in institutions, while the largest part of the aid resources was geared towards camps. A large majority of the international aid actors did not take into account the possible role and existing involvement of the Albanian civil society in the management of the crisis. Central to this mess was the lack of "COORDINATION".

In all these examples, a good partnership between NGO and Donors would have gone a long way in improving the quality of humanitarian action.

From there we can identify a few possible directions :

Actor	Possible opportunities offered by a NGO/donors partnership
NGO	<p>Get more involved in the field of evaluation, especially in collective or system wide evaluations;</p> <p>Get an enhanced strategy for Human Resources,; involving more in training</p> <p>Build or strengthen institutional memory</p> <p>Always question institutional ethic, professional deontology and individual morale</p>
Donors	<p>Accept funding diagnostic phases and exploratory missions, including through retroactive funding once the project has been accepted</p> <p>Support more evaluation fort learning rather than only focus on evaluation for control</p> <p>Facilitate adaptation of programmes to turbulent environment by creating a "adaptation enabling administrative system"</p> <p>Support training opportunities</p> <p>Accept fund allocation of collective institutional memory building</p> <p>Support information systems (such as the HIC in Afghanistan)</p> <p>Put more emphasis on ex-post impact assessment rather than in lengthy and burdening ex-ante financial control</p> <p>Accept more research projects</p>

It is worth mentioning that by all account ECHO made tremendous progress in that direction during the last few years. More resources have been allocated to research and training.

Mechanisms for funding ex-ante diagnosis and ex-post evaluation have been added in the procedures, etc.

To conclude, one can here draw what could be the five pillars of a successful and quality oriented partnership between NGO and donors.

- transparency;
- dialogue on political issues;
- dialogue on policy issues in relation to procedures;
- operational dialogue at the field and HQ levels;
- last but not least, and probably resulting from the four previous ones : confidence.

At the European level, ECHO and VOICE have been and shall continue to be central actors in the difficult but necessary clarification of the "rules of the game" for the establishment of successful partnership between the Commission and the European Civil Society.