

## **PEOPLE IN AID**

Code of Good Practice Implementation Report, June 2008 (revised)

*and*

Addendum to June 2008 Report, February 2009

# AUDITOR'S STATEMENT

Date of audit visit to People In Aid's London office: 26<sup>th</sup> September 2008

Interviewed: Jonathan Potter

Ben Emmens

Rekha Rajkumar

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## **EXPLANATORY NOTES**

### **Size and functional nature of the organisation**

People in Aid is the smallest organisation that has gone through the process of evaluating and reporting on its implementation of the People In Aid *Code of good practice in the support and management of people in aid*.

The number of staff is small – seven staff in total all of whom responded to the questionnaire. Two members of staff at the time of the survey were part-time and the analysis uses the responses of the five full-time staff only. While the statistical analysis of such a small universe of respondents is problematic the results show a high level of consensus and some useful differences of perception and knowledge among the five full-time staff. In my opinion the conclusions drawn from the survey and the action points are credible.

### **Staff survey and the audit process**

In my original meeting with People In Aid in September 2008 I expressed concern that the original Staff Survey indicated an unusually high level of concern about organisational coherence and consequently staff engagement and sense of loyalty. The data indicated a majority of staff satisfied and committed and a minority dissatisfied and possibly dysfunctional. Management confirmed that there was a staffing issue and I recommended that the survey be re-run once these issues had been resolved.

A new staff survey was completed in February 2009 and was submitted with new commentary for this audit. It was clear from the responses that the issue had been successfully addressed.

## **AUDITOR'S REMIT, INDEPENDENCE AND QUALIFICATIONS**

I have been appointed by People in Aid to carry out audits of the reports submitted by member agencies on their performance against the People In Aid Code of Good Practice in the Management and Support of Aid Personnel.

The auditor is otherwise independent of both People In Aid and the member agencies and their stakeholders.

Richard Evans, the auditor, the Director of ethics etc.... is a Member of the Institute of Social and Ethical AccountAbility. He has extensive experience of development (Intermediate Technology Development Group, Traidcraft, Christian Aid, Irish Agency for Personal Service Overseas) and has been involved in developing the AccountAbility AA1000 standards and the GRI Sustainability Reporting Guidelines.

## **PURPOSE OF THE AUDIT**

The main purpose of my audit is to form an opinion as to whether People in Aid's *Implementation Report June 2008 (revised)* together with the *February 2009 Addendum* gives an accurate and balanced view of the organisation's performance against the People In Aid Code of Good Practice in the Management and Support of Aid Personnel, and whether there is adequate evidence to support the claims made.

In evaluating the content of the report I am seeking to apply the three principle tests set out in AccountAbility's AA1000AS Assurance Standard. As they relate to the People in Aid Code, these are:

- **Materiality** – Is the information relevant to staff's concerns and interests and will it help them make informed judgments about People In Aid's performance in relation to managing and supporting their work?
- **Completeness** – Does the report provide sufficient evidence that People In Aid has understood and reported on all its significant social and economic impacts in relation to the seven People In Aid Code Principles?
- **Responsiveness** – Does the report demonstrate People In Aid's responses and commitment to improving its performance?

As well as examining and testing the claims made in the report I also evaluate the scope of the people management policies in place and the systems for implementing these policies.

## **AUDIT METHOD**

The audit of the report was limited to examining the report, reviewing supporting documentation and interviewing the Director, the Director of HR Services and the HR Services Manager regarding the claims made and the management systems that support staff in the London office.

## **FINDINGS**

### **People management policies**

People In Aid carried out a detailed analysis of its people management policies against the People In Aid Code. This is described, with conclusions, on page 8 of the report. All seven Code Principles are covered by written policies to a level that People In Aid considers 'good' or 'excellent'. I endorse this finding.

In assessing HR practice and implementation of the code, Principle 7 performance is rated 'good' and the remaining six Principles 'satisfactory'. The conclusions drawn in the report and the Action Points reflect awareness of inconsistencies in practice and strategies for addressing them, which meet the requirement for responsiveness.

The updated Action Plan in the Addendum to the report allocates responsibilities and timings for addressing the issues identified. There is no action attaching to Principle 4, Consultation and Communication. However, during 2007 and 2008 the organisation carried out 'review of working relationships' within the office, separate from the Implementation Report process.

## **MY OPINION**

On the basis of the report, the documents I examined and my interviews with managers of the organisation in London, I believe the report presents a *complete* and honest view of People In Aid's implementation of the People In Aid Code of Good Practice. The evaluation has been carried out with exemplary thoroughness and I am grateful to the management for accepting my recommendation to re-run the staff survey and to amend the report in the light of its findings.

Further, I believe People In Aid has heard and addressed the issues which are of concern (*material*) to employees not only as a part of the formal evaluation process but through other formal and informal communications, and has clearly set out how it will respond to shortcomings in its practice and to their needs.

## **A FOOTNOTE FOR PEOPLE IN AID DIRECTORS**

### **Relevance of the People In Aid Code**

People in Aid is one of a small number of organisations which are committed to implementing the People In Aid Code in their own management practice but do not have people working in 'aid' in the usual sense of managing and implementing programmes in development and humanitarian relief situations remote from the central management of the organisation. In addition, People In Aid is unique in that has no proxy implementing development and humanitarian relief programmes and is not a 'register' organisation for people seeking employment in such programmes.

It would be legitimate to ask whether the Implementation Report differs from a good staff opinion survey or a social audit of a commercial company committed to good human resource management practices.

## *ethics etc....*

The structure and hierarchy of the Guiding Principle and seven numbered Principles in the People In Aid Code were designed to address the operational conditions and needs of organisations working in aid and humanitarian relief situations. While these are not directly relevant to People In Aid's operations they serve to align People In Aid's good practice management with that of its member organisations.

However, the People In Aid Code is clearly of central relevance to the organisation since the development, propagation and guardianship of the standards of management enshrined in the Code are the central rationale for all its work.

During my initial discussion with People In Aid I suggested that Principle 6 of the Code, 'Learning, training and staff development throughout the organisation', had a particular relevance to People In Aid's mission *to promote, support and give recognition to good practice in people management within the humanitarian and development sector*. In order to equip its own staff to carry out this mission, learning, training and staff development in their knowledge of the Code and its implementation were mission critical aspects of its human resource management practice. I suggested that, given the unique role of People In Aid, its report should include an audit of staff and organisation knowledge. However, after discussion, we agreed that on this occasion, we would not include a staff and organisation knowledge audit as part of this audit process.

Subsequent reflection and discussions after the audit had taken place have confirmed the value of such knowledge audit as part of the social audit and People In Aid will scope the nature and extent of this additional dimension as part of the ongoing process of continuous improvement and audit.

I welcome this commitment. In auditing reports that evaluate implementation of the People In Aid Code I am responsible for assessing not only the completeness and materiality of the information relevant to the Code, but also the responsiveness of the organisation and the outcomes that provide evidence of its commitment to the Code 'on the ground'. In People In Aid's case, staff and organisational knowledge of the Code and its implementation and the provision of learning opportunities, training and staff development is an essential aspect of its HR management practice.

Looking forward three years to the next audit, I am convinced that this would be a valuable part of their evaluation. It is probable that the standard questions around Principle 6 will need to be augmented to highlight staff perceptions how well training equips them to work as advocates and mentors of the People In Aid Code in their work with current and potential member organisations.

These comments should not in any way be taken as a criticism of how People In Aid manages individual and organisation knowledge of the Code or of the actual state of that knowledge within the organisation. Without an audit, included in the Implementation Report, I have no way of making any judgement on this issue.

Richard Evans

*ethics etc...*

Alnwick, 20th March 2009