

**Minutes of the Quality and Accountability Initiatives meeting,
March 21st 2006, 2-5.30. Hosted by Coordination Sud.**

Present: ALNAP (Maurice Herson); Coordination Sud (Cecile Ziegler - staff, Nathalie Herlemont and Kate Halff - steering group); ECB (Pauline Wilson); Groupe URD (Francois Grunewald, Karla Levy); HAP-I (Nick Stockton); People In Aid (Jonathan Potter); Sphere (Alison Joyner, Hani Iskander). Minutes prepared by Jonathan Potter.

Cecile welcomed everybody to Coordination Sud and introductions were made.

MINUTES:

It was agreed that the model for the minutes, responding to queries about their purpose, would be those of October 2005. It was agreed that the minute-takers would contribute the French translation after each meeting.

ACTION: JP to talk with AJ re Spanish version.

UPDATES:

ALNAP:

- Biannuals in Kenya, June, food security; December, Rome, role of media.
- Publications: Review will focus on utilisation of evaluations; Protection guide soon in Japanese, Arabic and Spanish; Evaluating humanitarian action and concepts in participation are in preparation; 2 lessons learnt papers issued.
- Evaluations: joint evaluations being discussed;
- TEC studies at various stages with launch of synthesis in July at ECOSOC.
- Internal: 55 members and potential spread to Latin America.

ECB:

PW explained the background to ECB2, and emphasised the accountability aspect (specific focus on local people) and impact measurement (the differences felt by beneficiaries). There are existing standards and guidelines offering the 'what' but the 'how', the field practice, is ECB's focus. A Standing Team offers support to field operations. It uses a one-page set of basic elements on accountability and impact measurement developed by the seven agencies to assess practice. A 'How-to' guide is being prepared for field practitioners. ALNAP, Sphere and HAP-I have participated to avoid duplication. URD input is welcomed. A brief paper on ECB2 was distributed.

Sphere:

- Collaborations: with Church World Service hosting one-month consultancy (funded by Sphere Board members and other interested organisations) in Pakistan for training and awareness-raising in the aftermath of the earthquake; with HAP-I and ECB in field; with UN on Sphere as part of the clusters.
- The future of Sphere is as a community of practice, bringing experiences (tacit knowledge) together, with a focus on story-telling as the medium. Focal points are to be established around the world. This will be a voluntary commitment to support two-way communication between their context and the Sphere office. Focal points will ideally already have a position including Sphere – which could be anything from 5 to 100% of their time – and will have the backing of their organisation to be a focal point. Champions and moderators will respond to the

comments on Sphere posted by the community on the new interactive website (dissent is welcomed too).

HAP-I:

- The standards development project is to lead to a framework for certifying organisations by end 2006.
- The annual report will include an analysis of the perception of the 'state of accountability' resulting from the recent mini-survey.

People In Aid

- Updates: Kenya, Sri Lanka and India have been investigated as potential new areas for work; focus group was held on potential emergency response: prioritising preparedness for the moment.
- Upcoming: Managing People in Emergencies is being produced, to mirror the FME (Finance) website architecture; EPN is being run by People In Aid in June.

Coordination Sud:

- Synergie Qualite: 500 books have been distributed; translations will take place after some modifications (a leaflet is already available in English. Training for the HR component is planned.
- The website has summarised each of these initiatives.
- A conference in India, Pondichery (on quality of humanitarian action) in October is possible.

Groupe URD:

- Four elements to their work: evaluations in field, of eg ECHO; capitalisation = transferring knowledge to publications; training 150+ days per year; lobbying on eg donor flexibility
- Projet Compas: based on a questioning (rather than prescriptive) approach to quality assurance. 12 criteria, provided by beneficiaries. Being piloted by ICRC, WFP and INGOs.
- Dynamic Compas was presented: www.compasqualite.org. By recording information on a project the monitoring is made easier, time is saved, a project memory is created. It is open source rather than a community, with NGOs offered training and then a helpdesk function.

FG and AJ discussed complementarity; PW asked that evidence of use be produced.

SCANNING:

1. CZ notified the meeting about VANI's (Indian umbrella group) Credibility Alliance which is looking at quality issues. Today Credibility Alliance is a distinct initiative from VANI. NH reported that Handicap in India had been approached with a request that all HI's partners subscribe to the Alliance's principles.
2. CZ briefed the meeting on BOND's (UK umbrella group) new project looking into quality for its members. JP is on the advisory group.
3. NS reported that the International and Advocacy Group of NGOs, working with the Global Reporting Initiative will be reporting on their work on the Civicus website.
4. JP reported that Global Scale/ Recognition System was at feasibility study stage.

NH raised the issue of the proliferation of such accountability initiatives, particularly those with certification and accreditation. Academics are seen to be mustering on the horizon looking for work in this area also. It was suggested that this was a consequence of more money reaching the sector and that the market would, to a degree, ensure the ones adding value survived. It was confirmed that this grouping remains open to any relevant initiative.

DISCUSSION TOPICS/COLLABORATION:

1. JP raised the issue of training, prompted by a comment to him re ACBAR's potential for training in a variety of initiatives, and by a wish not to waste an opportunity as People In Aid looked to offer training in other countries. FG explained ACBAR's remit was not relevant to training but it was agreed that there are other umbrella groups, such as Dochas, with a mandate to enhance quality. It was decided that complementarity would be difficult due to different objectives, different constituencies (memberships) and different methods (in-house vs open training).
2. Focal points/field secondments. It was agreed no-one used the term field offices as noted on the agenda. Offices, even field presence is not a strategic objective for either Sphere or HAP-I. Following the initial Sphere consultancy in Pakistan two more such opportunities are being sought this year while CWS, in Pakistan, has taken the initiative to recruit a Sphere focal point position, funded by money they have raised themselves. Key to the success was hosting by an experienced organisation based locally. In this case, HAP-I has a protocol for emergency response and Sphere is developing one. URD would not need an office as the quality assurance process is worked through the NGO itself.
3. Impact of our organisations. There had been prior correspondence about what this meant, what was being done and whether there was convergence of activity. JP's project ToR, yet to be written, could encompass the effectiveness of HR or just the impact of the Code, as well as requiring work discovering how the Code was being used. Sphere's 2003 evaluation stated that Sphere's impact cannot be measured. It is hoped that the development of the Sphere community of practice will provide more concrete evidence of – and knowledge about - where and how Sphere is being used.
PW confirmed that the ideal is to measure how the organisation changed as a result of a Code or framework and only then look at the impact in the field. It was agreed that perceptions were critical: who to ask, and how many, is important. NS suggested that the costs of an initiative must first be measured and only then the cost-effectiveness.
ALNAP was asked to consider how to incorporate whether beneficiaries had been asked after the event what had happened and how, as an evaluation quality issue, alongside its evaluation Proforma which looks merely at the quality of evaluation reports. The answers could be linked back to Sphere standards, accountability principles, good HR practice etc.

The meeting closed at 5.30. The next meeting will be hosted by ALNAP on October 9th 2006 between 11 and 5.30. The next meeting will focus on specific issues/themes of interest, with less time on updates, and will consider whether Paris would be a more convenient venue for every meeting.