

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE
IASC WEEKLY MEETING

Summary Note

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Geneva

I Briefing on Corruption Risks in Humanitarian Assistance

Mr. Kevin Savage, Research Fellow at the Overseas Development Institute's (ODI) Humanitarian Policy Group, and Ms. Marie-Luise Mahlendorf, Program Coordinator at Transparency International (TI), briefed participants on the risks of corruption in humanitarian assistance based on the report 'Mapping the Risks of Corruption in Humanitarian Action' of July 2006, the two case studies on Liberia and Afghanistan of April/July 2007 and the recently undertaken NGO study 'Preventing Corruption in Humanitarian Assistance'.

Mr. Savage began his presentation by explaining how he as a former aid worker has experienced how managing and implementing projects, coordinating meetings and completing head quarter and donor reports often were made a priority at the expense of addressing whether the assistance was being corruptly abused. Being offered gifts and forced to accept bribes is also a problem faced by many aid workers. While these things have been experienced by many aid workers, corruption in relief has until recently largely been ignored due to fear that openly talking about it will undermine public support. Today efforts to combat corruption are to a large extent all about upwards accountability focusing on reports, accounts and audits to donors, hence more downwards accountability efforts are needed, such as further investments in (i) transparency, (ii) independent monitoring, evaluation and complaints mechanisms, (iii) greater scrutiny from the media, local civil society and human rights organisations, and (iv) human resource management (longer term contracts, human resource staff as part of emergency deployments etc.).

Identifying the risks of corruption, these are greatest where expenditures are largest (procurement, transport and distribution of high value commodities) and when power is exercised in the delivery and management of relief (when deciding who gets relief and who doesn't, just as the whole process of targeting, registration, distribution and recruitment). Case studies in Afghanistan and Liberia, moreover, suggest that aid workers tend to focus on risks before the aid is actually received by beneficiaries and consequently experience corruption with regard to procurement (bribes, kickbacks), hiring staff (nepotism) and partners (bribes for contracts). Corruption in relation to beneficiaries often occurs in relation to distribution (bribes to attend), targeting (bribes to get on list) and forced redistribution and taxation.

Building on the mapping of risks report and the ODI field studies, TI, with ODI and Tufts University, is undertaking a study on preventing corruption in humanitarian assistance. The outcome of this study will be a toolbox / handbook of good practice in minimising corruption risks and, furthermore, a number of joint research publications. The study will examine corruption risks from the perspective of humanitarian NGOs and their staff and is, therefore, undertaken in collaboration with seven humanitarian NGOs (World Vision International, Action Aid, Save the Children-US, Islamic Relief, Lutheran World Federation, CRS and CARE), selected with the purpose of establishing regional and country diversity. The

purpose is not to measure, investigate or uncover corrupt practices, but rather to work with agency staff to map out potential risks, just as the study will examine how agencies manage the necessity of preventing corruption and the imperative of managing a rapid and effective emergency response.

When the consultations have been finalized at head quarter and field level, two workshops will be convened with the purpose of sharing the findings and providing involved NGOs with the possibility of giving feed back before the report and toolbox are finalized in mid-summer 2008. While the first phase of this project is focusing on seven key humanitarian NGOs as indicated above it is expected during a following phase (which will approximately commences in 2009) to expand the project to involve UN agencies, disaster affected governments and other national humanitarian agencies. As a follow up to this statement, the Chair, Chief of the IASC Secretariat, Ms. Marilena Viviani, welcomed ODI and TI to keep the IASC updated on this approach and to share their findings with the IASC agencies. A participant, moreover, drew attention to the recently held Global Humanitarian Platform, which sought to increase partnership among NGOs, the Red Cross Movement and UN agencies and to address the issue of transparency among them, just as accountability and capacity building were identified as key topics to be addressed.

II AOB

Ms. Ute Kollies, Humanitarian Affairs Officer (OCHA's Geographical Coordination and Monitoring Section) provided participants with an update on the humanitarian situation in the Somali region (Ogaden) in Ethiopia.

Ogaden is the poorest regional state in Ethiopia and 1.8 million out of the 4.6 million big population is chronically food insecure. Since 1993 the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) has been fighting for independence and is behind major attacks in the region due to issues concerning distribution of resources coming from exploration of oil in Ogaden .

Currently, only few humanitarian agencies are active in the region, including UN presence in Jijjiga and limited presence of NGOs. Several UN agencies and NGOs systematically report denial of commercial traffic carrying food prior to or upon reaching the major towns in the militarised zones. Apart from reducing humanitarian access to the region, the ongoing military operations in Ogaden have led to 200% price inflation for food and a reduction in livestock prices by 50%. Rising food prices risk leading to a humanitarian crisis among pastoral and agro-pastoral communities in the region, who depend on trade with Somalia.

With regard to the health situation in the region, health conditions have deteriorated, particularly within the militarized zones. Several health and nutrition programs have been suspended, including UNICEF's Enhanced Outreach Strategy (EOS), and acute watery diarrhoea (AWD), malnutrition, polio, malaria and measles have been reported. As to protection, there is no reliable information on the number, needs and locations of IDPs, but they are estimated to be around 300,000.

OCHA is monitoring the situation closely and the Humanitarian Coordinator has been successful in his dialogue with the government to allow food access to the militarized zones. However, negotiations for an assessment mission, sustained humanitarian access, monitoring of assistance, and support for health interventions are still on-going.

Participants

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