

Review of Good Humanitarian Donorship Domestic Strategies

Adele Harmer (HPG, ODI) and Abby Stoddard (CIC, NYU)

Purpose of the review

In order to advance the goals of the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative, donor governments agreed to develop domestic strategies for ensuring the implementation of the GHD Principles and Good Practice.¹ The current Chair of GHD, the Government of Canada, requested a brief external review of the available strategies, focusing on areas of complementarity between them, identification of possible gaps, timeframes for delivery, and whether and how these strategies bring donors closer to the goals of GHD.

Key findings

Commitment in capitals

Domestic strategies are an important signifier of commitment at donor headquarters, which is critical to the implementation process. While GHD remains a voluntary initiative, it relies on the donors working in concert, and expanding the process from the humanitarian bureaucracy to the wider governmental sphere and into the field, to realise its goals. To date only 6 donor governments of a possible 22 have put these strategies into the public realm - an indication that donor governments are taking differing routes in ensuring the goals of GHD are effectively communicated and universally advanced.

Humanitarian policy development

The GHD initiative has prompted the development or renewal of humanitarian policy statements. This is a positive outcome of the process, as policy statements both provide a clear articulation of the government's objectives and enhance accountability in the public realm. Four donors have developed new humanitarian aid policies (Australia, Ireland, Sweden and Switzerland), with at least three others (Canada, Netherlands and the UK) signaling plans to develop policies to reflect the commitment to the goals of GHD.

Key elements of effective strategies

Ideally, the domestic strategies should serve as both a road map for carrying forward GHD objectives in donor capitals, and a communication tool for reaching out to other stakeholders and the public at large. An effective strategy should include:

- Plans for new or further actions and objectives, rather than an enumeration of how GHD principles are already reflected;
- A timeframe or target dates;
- A means of measuring progress toward the objectives;
- An indication of the person/office responsible; and,
- Identification of key participants/stakeholders in the process.

All of the strategies reviewed have some of these elements, but there are significant gaps.

Progress toward the goals of GHD

The strategies represent an important next step in GHD process and will help maintain momentum in the long-term commitment to principled and effective humanitarian action. At the same time they raise a number of questions that might be useful to explore in the July 2005 meeting, particularly regarding how the strategies might be utilized as a tool for monitoring and reporting on GHD progress in the future.

¹ *Chair's Overview: Continued Commitment to Good Humanitarian Donorship and a Roadmap for the Way Forward*, International Meeting on Good Humanitarian Donorship, Ottawa, Oct 21-22, 2004.

Review of GHD Domestic Strategies

Six domestic strategies were shared for the purposes of the study. Some were in draft form and it is assumed that all are designed to be 'active' documents, with the possibility of revision to reflect the outcomes of the various reform initiatives underway in the humanitarian system.

1 Areas of common focus and complementarity

Presentation and communication All the strategies take the form of management matrices, which list the principles and good practice (either separately or grouped under four main headings in a similar fashion to the DAC Peer Review Assessment Framework) and the corresponding activity, task, or goal. While useful as an organizational tool, which some donors saw as the main purpose of the exercise, these matrices make for awkward communications tools, and most employ internal language that is not helpful for outside readership. Canada's preamble was found to be particularly helpful in making the strategy a dual-use document as it situates the strategy in context of the broader commitment to GHD.

Funding according to need is a key focus of the domestic strategies.² However there is differing emphasis on the best way to achieve this. Most highlight that this goal is articulated in humanitarian policies or in communications with parliaments/ministers. Some highlight the importance of needs assessment as a process in its own right, but only one strategy identifies the need to provide a specific budget for supporting needs assessment. None speak to the importance of investing in collection of baseline data (or better data in general), although it might be assumed that the CHAP process is a route to achieving this.

Funding strategies Many of the strategies seek to address the financing of humanitarian action; identifying routes to ensure more predictable and non- or loosely earmarked support to operational agencies, as well as piloting pooled funding arrangements. This is an important shift from previous more tightly contractual and earmark-based donor financing. The approach implies that these policy changes advance the goal of funding according to need. However, none of the strategies identify mechanisms to test this. This is a critical area for future examination.

Capacity building and preparedness Most of the strategies acknowledge the importance of prevention and preparedness, particularly through support to the IFRC and national societies. None elaborate on other possible routes to assisting the capacity of affected states themselves. Only one is weighted to support for natural disasters, with the others focusing on conflict prevention and early warning. It might be interesting for donors to consider the nature of support for prevention and preparedness for different types of humanitarian crises, especially opportunities for harmonizing policy in this area.

Evaluation All strategies highlight the importance of evaluation and learning. Some emphasise the importance of evaluation of partner activities, others identify the importance of internal evaluation, and others focus on multi-donor evaluation and DAC joint country assessments. Given the purpose of GHD is to improve system-wide donor behaviour, it might be useful for all donors to consider the importance of multi-donor/joint country assessments with independent evaluators.

² DFID's proposes to compare the UK's 2005 humanitarian resource allocation against ECHO's 'Global Needs Assessment'. This is a useful way of testing the extent of its allocation to needs-based programming. It would be valuable if these results were made public, and other donors might consider such a process in 2006.

2 Gaps

Indicators and outcomes Canada's strategy is the only document to identify indicators against proposed activities. The UK has also set targets in its Public Service Agreement with the Treasury that measure progress against a range of goals, including lowering the gap between the best and worst funded CAPs. However, these do not cover all of the goals laid out in the domestic strategy. Some donors noted that domestic indicators are dependent on agreement on the global indicators. However at this stage the proposed global indicators are limited to funding and coordination. Ideally, the indicators in the domestic strategies would seek to measure progress on a wider range of GHD objectives, such as participation, capacity building, and the advancement of humanitarian principles and IHL.

Few donors prioritised 'Good practice: 23', which calls for better donor reporting on official humanitarian assistance spending. Given both internal and external reviews (including the proposed global indicators work) are so dependent on this for measuring progress on GHD, it seems to be a significant gap which deserves attention.

Stakeholders, timeframes, and responsible parties Most of the strategies reviewed identify the other relevant ministries and stakeholders for some (though not all) areas of activity, while only half of them include target dates for delivery. More of this information in the strategies would be valuable for communicating expectations to stakeholders as well as increasing the accountability of donors to the process. Few strategy documents identify individuals within the donor agency as responsible for specific areas. In general it would be beneficial to have an office or title associated with each objective to promote ownership in the undertaking.

Relationship of GHD to wider government approaches One of GHD's most significant challenges is the advancement within other areas of government of the concept of humanitarian action as a necessarily distinct sphere of action, governed by the principles of impartiality and neutrality, and responding to the dictates of need alone. How fully this concept comes to be supported by the executives and legislatures, as well as by the broader goals of development cooperation, will be a key indicator of GHD's overall success. The domestic strategies in general lack clarity on where the other relevant parts of development cooperation, or other ministries, including defense, must be engaged (often for the long-term) in the process. Given the increased approaches to joined-up governmental responses to crises, the challenges regarding the politicisation of aid and the increased humanitarian-military interface, a discussion of wider governmental responsibility and participation would seem to be vital.

3 Timeframes

Where timeframes are outlined, 2006 emerges as an important year for start dates and deliverables, including new policy statements, a range of important studies on resource allocation issues, and the piloting of new financing mechanisms. Capturing the outcomes of these many and varied initiatives in a consolidated manner will be important. A sense of a longer-term timeframe as well, ideally linked to the donors' own multi-year planning process, could enhance the strategies.

4 Consultation with domestic constituencies

The Canadian government consulted with its NGO partners in advance of finalizing the draft strategy, allowing for feedback and a clear understanding of the direction the Government was taking in advancing its commitments. During the consultation process, there was discussion amongst the Canadian NGO community of developing complementary strategies to reflect their

commitment corresponding to the GHD goals at the field level. This is a promising route to ensuring that donor intentions are also reflected in operational partnerships.

5 Moving towards the goals of GHD

The strategies are an important reflection of donor commitment to the GHD process, signaling the intent and the means to proceed with the next steps in the long term commitment to advancing the goals of good humanitarian donorship. To date, however, only six strategies are in the public domain. This reflects less than one-third of the donors that expressed a commitment to GHD in Ottawa in 2004.

The review found a tendency in some of the strategies to highlight where GHD principles and goals were already reflected in existing policy and practice. This echoes the feeling expressed by a few donors that they are already mostly in line with the GHD agenda, but that those activities merely need more grounding in policy and illumination in reporting. It would be an opportunity lost if this exercise was ultimately used to validate existing activity rather than increase efforts toward more principled and effective humanitarian action - the very purpose and spirit in which donors initiated the GHD process in Stockholm two years ago.

Finally, given there was recognition of the need to increase communication about GHD at all levels and with all stakeholders, this process is an important contribution to that goal. However the format of the strategies obscures the very important actions that will be carried out, and deserve to be more thematically addressed.

6 Questions for discussion

1. For those donors that have developed domestic strategies - what are the routes to improving these documents -as both a tool for monitoring and reporting on GHD progress on an annual basis and as a communications tool? For example,
 - How will the documents be utilized in strategic planning and budget cycles?
 - Should the strategies be developed or redesigned into a more effective communications tool, especially for public constituencies?
2. In addition to their usefulness in the DAC peer review process, do the strategies also form a basis for potential third party review? If so, what would this look like and what would be most useful for donors and their stakeholders?
3. There are obviously many routes to ensuring the goals of GHD are effectively communicated and universally advanced. Do other donors expect to develop and/or make public their domestic strategies over the coming year?
 - If not, what are the other ways that donors will be seeking to measure progress on this process?
 - Will the proposed work on global indicators be expanded to add benchmarks for important domestic activity related to GHD?