



Less Paper More Aid
Round-Table Discussion
Beirut, 10 December 2015
Summary Report

Through different international agreements, donors of humanitarian aid have committed to reducing the administrative burden on those receiving and managing donor funds. And yet to date progress on these commitments has been mixed. With the upcoming inaugural World Humanitarian Summit momentum is gaining, however, providing not only a platform for discussion but also impetus to examine the challenges in delivering humanitarian aid on the ground. In particular, interest has been expressed within the donor community to look at the issues related to their grant conditions. This includes the impact grant conditions have on NGOs and to consider options to reduce and/or review the relevant contractual obligations. ICVA is looking at donor conditions as part of the discussion around the Grand Bargain¹ recommendation stemming from the High Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing report².

Building on work already undertaken within the IASC Humanitarian Financing Task Team, this first phase of the project “Less Paper More Aid” sought to address this request by donors focussing on the issue of donor reporting requirements explicitly. Its aim was to provide the perspectives of, and give voice to, NGO staff delivering projects and complying with reporting requirements in the field. Through desk research and literature review, questionnaires and a round-table discussion with working groups, it involved 27 national and international NGOs and NGO platforms from 10 countries across West and Central Africa and Lebanon in the Middle East (11 NGOs in Lebanon filled the questionnaires).

The questionnaire garnered insight on: the task of reporting; the resources involved; the implications and effects reporting had on NGOs; and ways forward. Findings from the questionnaire were then used to shape the agenda for the Beirut round-table discussion where a more refined understanding of the specific challenges reporting posed and the steps for action were sought. 14 representatives from national and international NGOs attended the round-table held in Beirut on 10 December 2015. From the analysis of the data collected four key challenges emerged: **the task and frequency of reporting; the timing of reporting; the diversity in reporting formats; and the need to improve communication channels.**

The greatest cost associated with reporting was staff time. Using this time for reporting was not without consequence. The study found that reporting took time away from other NGO activities such as staff attention to program and organizational development, securing funding, implementation in the field, monitoring and evaluation and organizational learning. These findings question whether the current system of reporting is the most effective use of humanitarian resources. This is all the more pertinent as it was found that a significant proportion of reporting was regarded as duplicated effort.

¹ ICVA, together with the other two IASC consortia, is invited to participate in the debate and decision making process around the Grand Bargain – updates will be posted on <https://icvanetwork.org/humanitarian-financing>

² “Too important to fail: addressing the humanitarian financing gap,” https://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/whs_finance/HLPHumanitarianfinancing

As part of the study NGOs also offered alternative ways of doing business to tackle the most significant challenges with reporting they faced. These suggestions incorporated the theme of *less paper more aid* and were targeted at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of current systems from the standpoint of a field-based NGO. Some suggestions worked within the existing processes of donor reporting, while others represented more significant changes.

The NGO Task Force overseeing the donor conditions project suggested complementing the information gathered through the pilot field research with additional, qualitative data. Individual semi-structured interviews are currently ongoing with NGOs at HQ and regional levels.

Findings from this first phase will be combined with the outcomes of more extensive field research currently being carried out, including not only reporting, but also due diligence/partner capacity assessments and audit requirements.

Another round-table discussion took place in Amman on the 8th of March to discuss findings of the second phase and a final round-table is planned in Geneva at the beginning of April to validate the overall results of the research.

NGOs who participated to this exercise through the questionnaire and/or the round-table discussions will be kept informed about the process and receive a copy of the overall report as soon as it is published.

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