The NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project
A chance to influence the humanitarian system

How did the project begin?
The humanitarian reform process, launched in 2005 following the Humanitarian Response Review, aimed to improve the timeliness, effectiveness and predictability of the international response to humanitarian emergencies in order to better meet the basic needs of affected populations.

To date the reforms have included:
- Establishment in 2006 of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to increase funding available to UN agencies and the IOM, and introduction of country level pooled funds: the Emergency Response Funds (ERF) and Humanitarian Response Funds (HRF).
- Introduction of a system of cluster leads (Cluster Approach) to provide predictable leadership, coordination, accountability and act as the provider of last resort in the various response sectors.
- Strengthening the role of Humanitarian Coordinators in humanitarian response to better support field coordination.
- Endorsement of the *Principles of Partnership* by the Global Humanitarian Platform in 2007 to improve the ways humanitarian actors work together.

Despite progress being made, many NGOs, particularly national and local NGOs remain marginalised from the reforms, unable to adequately engage, with insufficient influence in UN-led humanitarian response policies and practices and unable to access sufficient funds in a timely manner from pooled funds. NGOs, which typically deliver the majority of humanitarian aid, need a powerful voice in these mechanisms and this project presents an opportunity for them to influence the humanitarian reform process.

So what is the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project?
The *NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project* aims to strengthen the effective engagement of local, national and international humanitarian NGOs in reformed humanitarian financing and coordination mechanisms at global and country levels. By supporting NGOs to better understand the reforms and highlighting where barriers exist to successful implementation of the reforms on the ground, the project will help improve international policies related to humanitarian reform and, improve the delivery of humanitarian aid and accountability to crisis-affected people.

The Project has a Project Manager, based in London, and Humanitarian Reform Officers (HROs) working in the four project focus countries: Afghanistan, DRC, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe. The HROs engage with the humanitarian reform process in-country and report on issues faced by NGOs. The project also generates field-based evidence information and lessons learnt to increase donor governments and the UN knowledge of best practice for effective engagement of NGOs in humanitarian response.

Who is involved?
Six NGOs - ActionAid, CAFOD, CARE International UK, International Rescue Committee, Oxfam and Save the Children UK – together with the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA). The project is funded by DFID and runs until October 2011.

**Work so far**

In July 2009 the project published Mapping Studies assessing the current state of global humanitarian reform efforts in five countries: Afghanistan, DRC, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and Sudan. A subsequent Synthesis Report was produced in October 2009: *Review of the engagement of NGOs with the humanitarian reform process.*

**Project Findings and Key issues:**

- Weak partnership: involvement of NGOs in reform processes has been inconsistent
- Leadership lacking: insufficiently experienced humanitarian leadership within the UN system
- Inconsistent coordination: lack of clarity on the roles of Cluster co-leads or co-chairs and a need for more effective NGO participation in the Clusters
- Downward accountability: clusters need to devote more attention to ensuring accountability to affected populations
- Humanitarian financing: limited local and national NGO access to country-based humanitarian pooled funds and slowness of disbursement to NGOs of ERF and HRF funding

**What’s next?**

The project is working to enhance the effective engagement of NGOs in humanitarian reform: This includes:

- Supporting more effective national and international NGO engagement with Clusters.
- Improving NGO access to pooled funds
- Enabling better involvement of, and accountability to, affected populations, particularly in the work of the Clusters
- Promoting closer collaboration on sharing needs assessment frameworks, vital for improving the appropriateness of humanitarian aid
- Providing greater NGO input on humanitarian leadership
- Global level advocacy to instigate broader improvements in the various elements of the reform response system
- Facilitating training for NGOs at the country level
- Documenting good practice and sharing best practice with key humanitarian stakeholders

Project website: [www.icva.org/ngosandhumanitarianreform.html](http://www.icva.org/ngosandhumanitarianreform.html)

October 2009