

HUMANITARIAN ALTERNATIVES

The challenges of the new French Humanitarian strategy

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For Alain Boinet and Benoît Miribel, the National Humanitarian Conference which took place on March 22nd in Paris represented a qualitative and quantitative leap forward for French humanitarian aid. The new French Humanitarian Strategy was particularly awaited.

The fourth National Humanitarian Conference was chaired by the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian, who declared that “humanitarian aid is a key player in crises”, and that “France wants to be at the vanguard, with the right course and means, and has decided to join the ‘Grand Bargain’ process”.

In all, fifteen decisions make up the pillars of the new French Humanitarian Strategy (2018-2022), for which a provisional budget of 500 million euros was announced. To this can be added the fund of 200 million euros from 2020, to finance crisis recovery, in a logic of contiguum from emergency to reconstruction, and up to the stage of the resumption of development. This approach has been qualified since the World Humanitarian Summit (2016) as an emergency-development nexus which fits into the financial logics of the famous “Grand Bargain”: international sponsors pool their resources on transversal programmes spanning several years, operated by consortiums. It is instructive to go back over the reasons for these developments and the ways in which they have taken place over the last decade, and to see what our collective issues are.

Back to the future

We must remember that between 1990 and 2010, the French humanitarian budget allocated to the Humanitarian Emergency Fund (FUH), discounting contributions to the European Union and the United Nations (UN), was between 10 and 15 million euros on average per year. It was implemented on an ad hoc basis, with no real strategy, in reaction to certain humanitarian emergencies. From the Crisis Unit to the Delegation for Humanitarian Action (DAH), France did develop a visibility in certain international crises and natural disasters but without allocating significant resources to NGOs nor facilitating their intervention capacities beyond the emergency stage.

It is true that most French NGOs did not base the development of their intervention capacities on French funds, but on Echo, the European Commission’s Department for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection, a real booster for European NGOs since the 1990s. Although proud to assert their independence, most French NGOs were happy to accept funding from the French government as long as it did not come with conditions, and allowed them to respect the humanitarian principles which they held dear.

Starting from this situation, how did we arrive at this second French humanitarian strategy, which, now with adequate resources, undoubtedly marks a significant leap forward?

A decade of structuring (2008-2018)

Called out in an “Open letter to Bernard Kouchner”, published in the journal *Humanitaire* in spring 2008¹, the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs reacted by officially conferring a “mission of analysis and proposals for the development of humanitarian action in situations of crisis and crisis recovery”. Drawing on a think tank² made up of renowned experts, a hundred interviews, and two missions carried out in Haiti and the Democratic Republic of Congo, we were able to hand in our report to the minister in June 2010. For the record, this analysis report contained 50 proposals, divided according to five axes:

- make “European humanitarian consensus”, based on the principles of humanity, impartiality and independence, one of the bases of future humanitarian strategy;
- define a framework document for French humanitarian strategy, accompanied by a programme spanning several years and punctuated by a National Humanitarian Conference every two years;
- significantly increase the budget for the Emergency Humanitarian Fund and the partnership with humanitarian players;
- create a fund for crisis recovery and reconstruction;
- create an advisory committee for crises and crisis recovery at the Ministry and Crisis Centre, in order to regularly follow international humanitarian priorities.

Alain Juppé fell in with Bernard Kouchner’s approach by organising the first National Humanitarian Conference on November 16th 2011. The “Group for Humanitarian Concertation”³ was launched at the same time by Serge Mostura, who was then the director of the Crisis Centre, and who also organised the drafting of the first Humanitarian Strategy (2012-2017). Laurent Fabius, the Foreign Minister during Hollande’s presidency, also joined the process and organised the second National Humanitarian Conference on March 31st 2014, which counted among the guests Valérie Amos, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and Kristalina Georgieva, EU Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response (Echo). Didier Le Bret was then director of the Crisis Centre (CDC), and followed in the footsteps of his predecessor Serge Mostura in order to ensure a permanent dialogue between NGOs and the CDC. The movement gradually gained in collective importance amongst humanitarian NGOs, with the Groupe URD ensuring a methodological follow-up and a mid-way review of the strategy in the spring of 2015.

Overall, the five-year strategy (2012-2017) was productive in terms of development, with the development and international solidarity conferences, the creation of a law regarding the

¹ Alain Boinet, “Lettre ouverte à Bernard Kouchner”, *Humanitaire*, n° 18, Spring 2008, 104-112.

² The report’s steering committee was made up of Kathrin Schick, Voice, Anne Héry, Handicap International-Humanité et Inclusion, Philippe Ryfman, academic, François Grünewald, Groupe URD., Benoît Miribel, Mérieux Foundation and Alain Boinet, Solidarités International.

³ The Group for Humanitarian Concertation brought together representatives from several departments of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs - particularly the Crisis and Support Centre, where its meetings took place - and directors of humanitarian organisations Acted, Action contre la Faim, Bioforce, Care, Coordination Sud, the French Red Cross, Handicap International (recently renamed Humanité et Inclusion), Médecins du Monde, Médecins Sans Frontières, Oxfam, Première Urgence Internationale, Secours Catholique, Secours Islamique France, Secours Populaire, Solidarités International, Triangle Génération Humanitaire and qualified members; Alain Boinet, Francis Charhon (President of the Emergency and Crisis Recovery think tank, GRUPC), Benoît Miribel.

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direction and programming of development and international solidarity, the setting up of a National Council for Development and International Solidarity (CNDSI), made up of 50 representatives of civil society including NGOs, and the adoption of a framework policy paper relative to the partnership with civil society.

And yet, at the same time, Official Development Assistance (ODA) in France kept falling, thereby accentuating the trend which had already begun at the end of Nicolas Sarkozy's presidency. Indeed, France's ODA went from 0.495% of the GNI in 2010 to 0,434% in 2017. With regard to the partnership with NGOs, the promise to double the percentage of ODA channelled through NGOs was essentially limited to the domain of development - with the doubling of the NGO initiative of ODA, DPO (the Division of Partnerships with NGOs) grew from 42 to 80 million euros – but almost none of that went to humanitarian aid!

The context of the third National Humanitarian Conference in March 2016, organised at a key point in the preparations for the World Humanitarian Summit, was the opportunity to include a large number of French NGOs, involved in both emergencies and development. Coordination Sud was therefore able to put forward a number of collective positions, under the active presidency of Philippe Jahshan. This was out of a concern to incorporate humanitarian priorities which until then had not been sufficiently taken into account within Coordination Sud. On this point, there is no denying that the informal setting of the Forum Espace Humanitaire (FEH), launched in 2009 to bring together the main directors of French NGOs, allowed for the emergence of dialogue and an increased understanding of each organisation's priorities, from humanitarian aid to development. Moreover, the creation of a kind of de facto "humanitarian coalition", bringing together six people and organisations⁴, to encourage this dialogue, enabled the evolution of the Coordination d'Agén, the founding collective and member of Coordination Sud. Indeed, with the goodwill of Patrick Edel, the founding president, the Coordination d'Agén became the Coordination Humanitaire et Développement⁵. This allowed for the gathering together of almost all of the humanitarian NGOs and enabled easier concertation with public authorities.

Which Resources in the Service of the Humanitarian Strategy?

Although the first French Humanitarian Strategy (2012-2017) had the merit of existing and setting priorities, it was not really accompanied by significant financial commitments. This was the focus of the second French Humanitarian Strategy, presented by Patrice Paoli, the director of the Crisis and Support Centre at the quai d'Orsay.

The latter presented the main lines of the new strategy for the period 2018-2022⁶, aligned to Macron's five-year mandate. The clearly-stated ambition is to engage in a diplomacy of international humanitarian law. This priority has undoubtedly already materialised on behalf of the French authorities - as we can see with the French mobilisation against the use of chemical weapons in Syria, the reinforcement of access to humanitarian aid, or the project of the International Conference on the Yemen in Paris at the end of June [became a simple meeting of experts in the meantime, Editor's Note], where the sensitive question of arms sales to Saudi

⁴ Alain Boinet, Benoît Miribel, Thierry Mauricet (Première Urgence Internationale), Patrick Verbruggen (Triangle Génération Humanitaire), Rachid Lahlou (Secours Islamique France) and Antoine Peigney (French Red Cross).

⁵ Coordination Humanitaire et Développement (CHD): www.chd.org It is jointly presided by Xavier Boutin and Alain Boinet, member of the board of directors of Coordination Sud and its humanitarian referent, in partnership with the humanitarian commission led by Pauline Chetcutti of ACF.

⁶ France diplomatique, "Une nouvelle stratégie française pour répondre à des besoins croissants", www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/politique-etrangere-de-la-france/action-humanitaire-d-urgence/strategie-humanitaire-de-la-france-2018-2022

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Arabia will not be overlooked. The strategy also insists, with good reason, on the necessary protection of humanitarian and health personnel, and strongly reaffirms its will to pursue the initiative aimed at providing a framework for the use of the veto at the UN Security Council in the event of mass atrocities.

But NGOs were most eagerly awaiting the government's position on the financial resources to be allocated to this strategy, since it is true that any strategy must have adequate resources. For the record, French bilateral humanitarian aid has three components: the contributions to UN and ICRC humanitarian agencies, Programmed Food Aid (AAP), and the Emergency Humanitarian Fund (FUH), which finances emergency humanitarian aid by way of subsidies for NGOs, international organisations or direct State interventions. In all, France committed to allocating 500 million euros by 2022 (compared to 150 in 2016), by way of the three previously cited tools. To this sum must be added France's contribution to the humanitarian budget of the European Union (Echo), which is between 250 and 350 million euros per year. According to the 2017 Global Humanitarian Assistance Report⁷, in 2016, France was ranked 10th worldwide with a contribution of 585 million dollars. If we add up these figures, we come to a contribution of roughly one billion dollars, equivalent to the fourth rank globally and the third in Europe. The effort and progress made must not be understated, in spite of the discrepancies which remain between the three leading Eurozone countries.

Emmanuel Macron decided to reverse the decline in ODA and to bring it from 0,38% of the GNI in 2016 to 0,55% in 2022. He has announced this publicly on several occasions, most notably during the United Nations General Assembly on September 14th 2017. The Prime Minister defined the trajectory of the increase during the Inter-Ministerial Committee for International Cooperation and Development (CICID): 0,44% in 2019, 0,47% in 2020, 0,51% in 2021, and 0,55% in 2022. To be sure, this still does not amount to the goal of 0,7% historically fixed (and still supported by a number of NGOs), but this increase nevertheless represents 6 billion euros, going from roughly 9,6 to 15 billion euros. This is a clear change in direction. Will the aim for a budget of 500 million euros dedicated to humanitarian aid by 2022 be respected? Jean-Yves Le Drian replied that it was understood. Yet we know that the arbitration has been difficult and that Bercy could try to impede this budgetary increase, and even try to backpedal.

The Necessary Mobilisation of Humanitarian NGOs

Vigilance is necessary, along with a constructive mobilisation on behalf of the parties involved, so that the decisions of the CICID from February 8th 2017⁸ are implemented, along with the French Humanitarian Strategy of course.

It is logical and necessary that the increase in the humanitarian budget be indexed on that of the ODA in order to gradually achieve its objective of 500 million euros by 2022. Only such a trajectory will allow for the effective implementation of this decision and thereby bring the necessary resources in response to humanitarian crises.

Secondly, as part of the Strategy, a plan of action for the implementation of these resources is required, and also for the 10 priorities of the "Grand Bargain", particularly in the fields of

⁷ Development Initiatives, *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2017*, <http://devinit.org/post/global-humanitarian-assistance-2017/>

⁸ Inter-Ministerial Committee for International Cooperation and Development (CICID), *Relevé de conclusions*, February 8th 2018, www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/releve_de_conclusions_du_comite_interministeriel_de_cooperation_internationale_et_de_developpement_-_08.02.2018_cle4ea6e2-2.pdf

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administrative simplification, localisation, and the emergency-development nexus. Yet we insist on the one hand on the fact that the “Grand Bargain” inadvertently ignores weaknesses in capacity in the face of emergency situations, which namely justified the decision of *Médecins sans Frontières* to not participate in the Summit in Istanbul⁹. On the other hand, humanitarian NGOs are not responsible for peace, or for the Millenium Development Goals, even though they may wish for them to materialise and to contribute to their achievement - especially if the populations in question agree with them.

It must be noted that the NGO members of Coordination Sud, which brings together humanitarian and development associations, ask that the annual amount of public funding channelled through French NGOs be at least one billion dollars by 2022, in order to come close to the average for OECD member States¹⁰. Indeed, the percentage of bilateral ODA channelled through NGOs was 2,8% in 2016, compared to 14,9% on average for the other 28 countries!

When we met with the President on September 5th at the Elysée, we therefore suggested that he rethink the very structure of ODA in order to adapt it to the major challenges¹¹ that the world is facing. Everyone currently agrees that humanitarian capacities are grossly inadequate, given the exponential increase in needs. In this context, we asked him to allocate at least 10% of ODA in the future to humanitarian aid, given that it is currently at 2,3% in France, compared to an average of 12,9% for OECD member States (2015 figures)¹².

The creation and development of the Peace and Resilience Fund (Minka) at the Agence française de développement (AFD) is also a step in this direction, and must be properly coordinated with the Crisis and Support Centre in order to increase resources overall and better respond to the necessary transition from emergency situations, to reconstruction and crisis recovery, to the resumption of development. The role of embassies and diplomatic networks is also key in encouraging non-governmental action in all its richness and diversity of intervention in the field.

A 10-year cycle is drawing to a close with a new humanitarian strategy for structures and resources, and the five-year mandate which is beginning will be the unit of measure in the implementation by 2022. The stakes are high, considering that the number of refugees in the world has gone from 39,5 million in 2006 to 65,6 million in 2016 and that 136 million people are in need of assistance, from Syria to Yemen, from DRC to Afghanistan. Similarly, natural disasters are impacting increasing numbers of people, 124 million in 2012 and 204 million in 2016.

This trend will continue as a result of a growing population, climate change, and poverty, which result in dangerous ethnic and religious tensions for these populations and, by extension, for neighbouring countries. In April 2018, 70% of French people believed that what will happen in fragile countries in the years to come will have an impact on their own lives in France¹³.

⁹ Irin, “MSF se retire du Sommet humanitaire mondial”, May 5th 2016, www.irinnews.org/fr/actualite/C3%A9s/2016/05/04/msf-se-retire-du-sommet-humanitaire-mondial See the different “Emergency Gap” reports drafted by MSF’s *Centre for Applied Reflection on Humanitarian Practice*, and, for an overview, the global report *Emergency Gap Final Report: Bridging the emergency gap Reflections and a call for action after a two-year exploration of emergency response in acute conflict*, April 4th 2018, <https://arhp.msf.es/emergency-gap-final-report-bridging-emergency-gap>

¹⁰ OCDE, Aid for civil society organisations, January 2018.

¹¹ <https://defishumanitaires.com>

¹² Peer review of the OECD’s CAD, Cooperation for development, “Une revue alternative du bilan de la politique de développement et de solidarité internationale de la France entre 2013 et 2017 par la société civile”, November 2018, www.gispe.org/etude-OCDE-dec-2017-web.pdf

¹³ AFD/IPSOS barometer on development assistance in France, April 2018.

Experience has shown us during this decade of structuring of humanitarian priorities, that both for public authorities and NGOs, nothing can happen without dialogue and mobilisation. It is therefore our collective responsibility to actively follow the issue of the funds allocated to this new French Humanitarian strategy.

Translated from the French by Juliet Powys

Biographies

Alain Boinet • Founder and former director-general of the NGO Solidarités Internationales, created in 1980, and active today in twenty countries. In 2010, he co-authored the report *Analyses and proposals for humanitarian action in crisis and crisis recovery situations* with Benoît Miribel, for the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Bernard Kouchner. He is the sponsor of the 2017-2018 class at the Bioforce Institute and manages the website <https://defishumanitaires.com>

Benoît Miribel • Since January 2007, he has been the director-general of the Fondation Mérieux, specialised in the fight against infectious disease, particularly in developing countries. Since June 2013, he has also been the honorary president of *Action Contre la Faim*, which he presided from 2010 to 2013 and directed from 2003 to 2006. He was the director-general of the Bioforce Institute from 2003 to 2007. He is the president of the Centre Français des Fonds et Fondations (CFF). Benoît Miribel is also the co-founder of the Forum Espace Humanitaire (FEH) and the Emergency and Crisis Recovery think tank, a member of the board of directors for the Convergences Forum and of the NGO Friendship-France. Benoît Miribel is a graduate of the Institut d'études politiques in Lyon and holds a DEA in International Relations from the Université de Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne. He is the co-founder of the *Humanitarian Alternatives* review and a member of its board of directors.

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