February 1997

RELIEF AND REHABILITATION NETWORK

RRN

NETWORK paper

20

The People In Aid Code Of Best Practice

in the Management and Support of Aid Personnel

This is the first edition of the People in Aid Code of Best Practice. It has been superseded by a revised edition, which was published in September 2003.

The revised code is available at the People in Aid website:

http://www.peopleinaid.org.uk/code/index.htm

odi

PEOPLE IN AID LOGO

Sara Davidson
with

Action Health
British Red Cross
International Health Exchange
Medical Foundation
Overseas Development Administration
Overseas Development Institute
Oxfam
RedR
Returned Volunteer Action
Save the Children
Tear Fund

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank all members of the People in Aid project steering group for their contribution and commitment to the Code of Best Practice, including the Overseas Development Administration, which provided funding, and the British Red Cross, which found us office space.

I would also like to thank the many people working in the international aid community and in the fields of management, education and industrial relations who have so generously lent information, knowledge, wisdom and encouragement to the People in Aid initiative.

Finally, my thanks must go to Isobel McConnan and her colleagues at International Health Exchange for many kindnesses, and an attention to management and support which sometimes made me wonder if our project was really necessary.

Sara Davidson
Inter-Agency Co-ordinator

Contents

DEFINITIONS

Aid agency	An 'aid agency' or 'agency', as used throughout this document, is an entity in the public or voluntary sectors whose primary activity is the transfer of expertise or human, financial or material resources for charitable or humanitarian purposes to middle- and low-income countries, and to countries affected by war, civil strife or disaster.
Field staff	'Field staff' are staff who normally work in a location to which aid agency resources are directed. Unless otherwise indicated, the term is used without distinction to refer to host country and expatriate staff, volunteer, salaried and contract staff, and to managers and other groups of workers.
Expatriate	'Expatriate field staff ' or 'expatriate' here refers to staff who work in field projects located outside the country in which they have nationality or in which they are normally resident. Unless otherwise indicated, the term is used without distinction to refer both to nationals of the country where the agency has its headquarters and to nationals of third countries.
Host country	'Host country' refers to staff who are nationals of, or normally resident in, the country to which aid agency resources are directed. Unless otherwise indicated, the text makes no distinction between volunteer and salaried staff, nor between managers and other groups of workers.

Preface

The People in Aid Code is an important contribution by British aid agencies to the international debate on standards in humanitarian assistance and long-term development.

The organisations that undertook this task include relief and development agencies large and small. In compiling the Code, People in Aid have drawn on the experience and expertise of agencies that are household names, as well as those whose profile is lower but whose contribution to the British development programme is no less important.

Development agency field staff confront unique challenges in their day to day work. Recognising this, the people in Aid Code represents a three-fold commitment: to the quality and effectiveness of aid, to the effective management of aid personnel, and to the protection and well being of those who work under circumstances that are frequently difficult, dangerous and sometimes life-threatening.

By addressing these issues, the Code also represents a unique challenge to the aid community. It is a challenge we at the Overseas Development Administration take seriously. We are glad to be involved in this initiative: we welcome the Code and give it our support.

1

Introduction

If all the articles, essays and books ever written about international humanitarian relief and development were a library of a thousand volumes, it is doubtful that the people who work for aid agencies would take up much more than one chapter of one volume.

This is surprising because the objectives and values of aid are, after all, to do with people. These values focus on human welfare and development: on ways to prevent and alleviate suffering, discrimination, and the infringement of human rights. And, whatever else it is, aid is a labour-intensive occupation.

Like other organisations, aid agencies have seen many changes in recent years. Like other employers, they have had to adapt to a world of financial uncertainty, technological transformation and political - and historical - change.

But aid agencies are also unlike other organisations. They have a mandate to send their staff, national or international, salaried staff or volunteers, to work in parts of the world where global and regional change have threatened security and development; where the boundary between war and peace has grown harder to distinguish; and where the scale and complexity of emergencies have drastically increased.

First and foremost, this change means greater vulnerability for the people of those regions. Secondly, it puts increasing demands on their resourcefulness and that of the staff of local agencies and institutions. Though they are less often in the front line, aid agency field staff are not immune to these risks and pressures.

Global and regional change have also altered the balance between relief and development in aid budgets and changed the way international aid agencies and donors view the way they work, individually and collectively. Whether or not they are working effectively has been the question underpinning recent international evaluations of relief work in Rwanda and Sudan.

The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, drawn up by the Geneva-based Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR), was one of the first attempts by relief agencies to agree a common frame of policy reference. The InterAction NGO Field Cooperation Protocol, drawn up by aid agencies in the USA, formalised the sharing of operational information by NGOs working in the same country or region. At the time of writing, SCHR and InterAction are planning a 'Beneficiaries' Charter' which will set minimum entitlements to shelter, food, health care and other necessities for those affected by disaster.

The People in Aid project began in 1994, when four British aid organisations, with funding from the Overseas Development Administration, commissioned a survey into the working experience of expatriate field staff and managers working for British and Irish-based agencies. Rebecca Macnair's findings, backed by anecdotal evidence from agency managers and staff, put the case for a professional standard on field staff management to match their employers' commitment to common policies in other areas.

Room For Improvement (Macnair R. 1995, Network Paper 10, Relief and Rehabilitation Network) concluded that for many expatriate field staff, occupational stress was not only a product of the danger and emotional impact of their work but that, in common with those working in other spheres, it was also caused by workload, management problems and the insecurity of short-term contracts. The report underlined the need for agencies to ensure that their philosophy of humane action and human welfare embraces the employees to whom they owe a duty of care, as well as the project beneficiaries they are mandated to serve.

In response to the recommendations of Room For Improvement, a group of eleven organisations began work in 1996 on the Code Of Best Practice In The Management And Support Of Aid Personnel.

The group reviewed human resource management practice both inside and outside the aid sector and presented a draft Statement of Principles at People in Aid's Workshop, Putting People First, held in July 1996. Representatives of over 50 international aid agencies gave the Statement of Principles broad support. They were adamant that the Code should clearly refer to all staff, including volunteer and contract staff, who work in relief and development field programmes, whatever their country of origin.

The People in Aid Code complements those of SCHR and InterAction but is different in three ways. Firstly, it is intended for use by development as well as relief agencies. Secondly, it includes indicators against which achievement in implementing the Code can be measured by internal and external evaluators. Thirdly, the Code will undergo testing by a number of agencies over a period of up to three years and its effectiveness will be evaluated.

The discussion that follows each of the seven Principles includes a brief case study drawn from current practice by British- and Irish-based agencies. The case studies are used to exemplify indicators and share experience rather than to prescribe a specific course of action for other agencies. Nevertheless, each case demonstrates that best practice in the management and support of aid personnel is achievable: that the process has, in fact, already begun.

We hope the Code will focus fresh attention on human resource issues, and that the question of people who work in aid programmes will now occupy a position deservedly high on the agenda of future debates.

2

PEOPLE IN AID

Statement of Principles

Principle 1:

The people who work for us are integral to our effectiveness and success

Our approach to the people in our organisation is a fundamental part of our work. We recognise that the effectiveness and success of our organisation depend on all the people who work for us. Human resource issues are integral to our strategic plans.

Principle 2:

Our human resource policies aim for best practice

We recognise that our human resource policies should aim constantly for best practice. We do not aim to respond solely to minimum legal, professional or donor requirements.

Principle 3:

Our human resource policies aim to be effective, efficient, fair and transparent

We recognise that our policies must enable us to achieve both effectiveness in our work and good quality of working life for our staff. Our human resource policies therefore aim to be effective, efficient, fair and transparent and to promote equality of opportunity.

Principle 4:

We consult our field staff when we develop human resource policy

We recognise that we must implement, monitor and continuously develop our human resource policies in consultation with the people who work for us. We aim to include field personnel in this process, whether they are full-time, part-time, temporary, short-term or long-term members of our staff.

Principle 5:

Plans and budgets reflect our responsibilities towards our field staff

We recognise that the effectiveness and success of our field operations depend on the contribution of all the salaried, contract or volunteer staff involved in them. Operational plans and budgets aim to reflect fully our responsibilities for staff management, support, development, security and well-being.

Principle 6:

We provide appropriate training and support

We recognise that we must provide relevant training and support to help staff work effectively and professionally. We aim to give them appropriate personal and professional support and development before, during and after their field assignments.

Principle 7:

We take all reasonable steps to ensure staff security and well-being

We recognise that the work of relief and development agencies often places great demands on staff in conditions of complexity and risk. We take all reasonable steps to ensure the security and well-being of staff and their families.

3

Principle 1:
The people who work for us are integral to our effectiveness and success

Our approach to the people in our organisation is a fundamental part of our work. We recognise that the effectiveness and success of our organisation depend on all the people who work for us. Human resource issues are integral to our strategic plans.

KEY INDICATORS

- The Chief Executive or Chair has made a written and public commitment to the People in Aid Code of Best Practice.
- The agency's corporate strategy or business plan explicitly values field staff for their contri bution to corporate as well as project objectives.
- The agency allocates resources to enable its managers to meet staff support, training and development needs.
- The agency assigns responsibility and appropriate authority for implementing the People in Aid Code to a named project manager.
- The agency informs field staff and their line managers that the agency is committed to the People in Aid Code and supports this initiative.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Field staff need to know that the agencies employing them value people for more than their immediate usefulness to projects. Host governments, partner organisations and the wider aid community need to know that the agencies they work with demonstrate professionalism in all their activities. Donors need to know that their funds are committed to agencies that know how to manage all their resources, including human ones, effectively.

The People in Aid Code is about more than making field staff better at their jobs or happier about their role. It is also about corporate effectiveness and ensuring the key contribution field staff make is valued. An agency may need to re-examine corporate thinking about field staff when it implements the Code. That is why real support and commitment at the highest level in the agency are crucial.

Most agencies have a written corporate strategy or business plan. The Code should be a part of that strategy and of agency budgets, plans and discussions. The decision to endorse the Code should be in writing if it is to become part of institutional thinking and corporate memory. Once endorsed, the Code needs to be common knowledge and a shared commitment by decision makers and managers within the agency. Without this commitment, it will be difficult to carry through the implementation process.

Commitment to the Code and its implementation must be sustainable: this will call for allocation of people, time and money - probably in that order. If responsibility for implementing the Code is delegated to a member of staff, some or all of his or her current work may have to be reassigned. The project manager must have the time and status needed to put principles into practice. He or she should in turn report to a senior manager within the organisation.

People, programmes and strategic change at PLAN International

The development agency, PLAN International, began to change its approach to field staff management in 1996. It started to look at competencies - the attributes as well as the technical skills - that help make field staff successful.

PLAN had recognised that many of its senior field staff needed additional support when the agency moved from supporting solely micro-projects to a nationally focused programme for each of the countries in which it worked. This meant major structural change, establishment of higher-profile field offices in capital cities, and local as well as international fundraising. PLAN saw attention to its people and the competency approach as key factors in helping manage transition to the new structure.

Introducing this new approach took careful planning and allocation of resources, staff and budget. With the backing of its Senior Management Group, PLAN appointed a dedicated project manager, a respected country programme director with several years' field experience, to work with its human resource management (HRM) team.

The team interviewed and involved senior managers and country directors in deciding what attributes were key for effective field staff and programmes. In this way, valuable experience was shared and the process of change involved the people who would implement and be affected by it.

Though it is early days, PLAN expects competencies to become an important element of field staff recruitment and career development. The process of developing and introducing core competencies has, at times, proved frustrating. Nevertheless, the agency hopes that this approach, together with other support to staff through a period of change, will result in better prepared and committed senior field staff and more effective programmes that support children in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

4

Principle 2:
Our human resource policies aim for best practice

We recognise that our human resource policies should aim constantly for best practice. We do not aim to respond solely to minimum legal, professional or donor requirements.

KEY INDICATORS

- The agency sets out in writing the policies that relate to field staff employment.
- Policies comply with best practice if field staff are, in practical terms, outside the scope of legal provision.
- Policies respond to best practice initiatives in the aid sector and to changes in working and legal environments.
- The agency familiarises field staff with policies that affect them at the start of assignments and when significant changes take place.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Documenting policies on field staff management and support helps ensure staff and agency know what to expect from each other. This is important if staff are appointed in one country or region yet normally work elsewhere. It is also important if groups of staff within the same agency have different rights and expectations. That may be the case where expatriate, host and third country nationals work together.

Agencies and their field staff need to know which national law applies and what that means in practice. For example, UK health & safety laws do not normally protect agency staff who work in hazardous conditions outside the UK. So what action should be taken, reports made or records kept if field staff are injured at work? Can staff on temporary or volunteer contracts expect local employment laws to protect them? Is it possible or desirable to rely on local law in regions at war?

If, for all practical purposes, some field staff are left outside the scope of legislation relating to employment, agencies should aim to comply with best practice by similar agencies and inform their staff accordingly.

Policies relating to field staff might include health and safety, including malaria protection, immunisation and first aid; security; smoking; alcohol and drug abuse; HIV/AIDS; maternity leave; family care; equal pay and opportunities; insurance; pensions; training; harassment; personal use of project vehicles.

The list may look lengthy but most agencies will have related policies in use at head office. Consultation with field staff or their representatives may enable the agency to formulate policies appropriate to field needs.

Finally, donor expectations may make it difficult for aid agencies to spend time and money on themselves and their staff. But endorsing best practice initiatives means making a commitment to effectiveness and quality in aid. Investing in people is part of that commitment. People who do things well save time and money too.

International employment issues: aiming for best practice at CARE

CARE International is a confederation of nine northern NGOs with offices in Europe, North America and Australia. It has field programmes in 65 countries. Its workforce includes salaried staff, volunteers recruited on its behalf by other agencies, interns or *stagiaires* gaining work experience, and consultants.

Most of its 10,000 field staff are recruited locally in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe. As a signatory to the InterAction NGO Field Cooperation Protocol, CARE ensures host country staff terms and conditions are compatible with those of other humanitarian organisations. Terms, conditions and human resource policy are normally contained in a staff handbook.

CARE's International Personnel Policy governs terms and conditions for staff working outside their own country. For expatriate salaried staff working in field programmes, the starting point is the employment contract used by CARE USA. This is adapted to comply with employment law in the country of recruitment while aiming to ensure CARE benefits for this group are similar.

These include insurance for disability, loss of life, work in war zones, medical and dental treatment, travel and personal effects. The agency calculates employer's national insurance at statutory US rates, and CARE USA also contributes towards a pension plan. At the end of their contracts, non-US citizens can either claim a cheque for these savings or continue to maintain contributions in the US.

As CARE grows, expatriates may increasingly be offered contracts based on UK, Canadian or Australian law. The agency's International Staff Working Group keeps personnel policy, terms and conditions under review, and acts as an appeals tribunal if there is disagreement on international personnel matters. Expatriate field staff participate in this forum through membership of the Care Overseas Association. The Association is financed by members' subscriptions, and elects its own representatives to negotiate with management.

5

Principle 3:
Our human resource policies aim to be effective, efficient, fair and transparent

We recognise that our policies must enable us to achieve both effectiveness in our work and good quality of working life for our staff. Our human resource policies therefore aim to be effective, efficient, fair and transparent, and to promote equality of opportunity.

KEY INDICATORS

- New programme and field managers are recruited in part for their people management skills. New and existing managers receive training in recruitment, staff appraisal and equal opportunities.
- Field staff have clear work objectives and performance standards, know whom they report to and what management support the agency will give them.
- The agency monitors how well recruitment and people management meet:
  - corporate and programme aims
  - field staff expectations of fairness and transparency
  - equal opportunities targets.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

It is said that projects in any sphere often fail to reach their optimum level of performance not because of any lack of money, equipment or systems but because human factors have not been adequately addressed.

People management skills are not always a priority when programme managers are recruited. However, programme managers, not personnel managers, often decide field appointments and develop, support and manage teams. If field staff are to be effective, they need to know what their job is, what performance standards are expected, to whom they report, and what support, guidance and feedback they can expect. Recruitment and management should be transparent and fair. They should offer equality of opportunity and respect the human rights and dignity of field staff.

Existing agency systems do not necessarily need mending but whatever procedures are in use, they need to demonstrate how well they get the right people to the right place at the right time. They also need to make sure those people are content to stay with the agency. Failure to complete a contract can be damaging for all parties concerned, resulting in extra costs and loss of effectiveness and reputation for the agency, and in distress, loss of income and reduced job prospects for the former employee. Monitoring progress against objectives will demonstrate what really works and where changes need to be made.

Volunteers and salaried staff: recruiting international personnel at Concern

Whether field staff are recruited on volunteer or salaried terms, their calibre and the quality of management and technical skills directly determine programme effectiveness, efficiency and service to beneficiary communities, according to Concern Worldwide.

Concern employs 5,000 host country staff and up to 200 international volunteers and salaried staff in 13 countries. In each country, local field staff responsible for programme work are supported by international personnel recruited for their particular professional or managerial skills. Host country field staff work on salaried terms and are recruited directly by the relevant country office.

International staff normally work on volunteer terms for the first two years of service. If a country director needs to recruit international field staff, salaried or volunteer, he or she completes a staff requisition form. This details the job to be done, plus programme information such as project location, degree of isolation and whether an assignee can be accompanied by partner and children. The staff requisition also details the education, experience, personal qualities and technical skills needed to do the job, and explains why an expatriate is necessary.

It also outlines pre-departure and post-arrival training recommendations. The staff requisition is forwarded to the Personnel Division at headquarters in Dublin. There the Recruitment Officer prepares a person specification and a job description. The job description includes the main purpose of the job, specific work targets and reporting lines. It also provides background information and briefing notes for potential assignees.

For shorter-term emergency relief programmes, the process is speeded up. Generic job descriptions and person specifications are adapted to local circumstances and emphasis is placed on recruitment of volunteers and staff with previous experience.

Concern Worldwide plans to build further on the requisition system, linking it to performance appraisal and monitoring systems which the agency hopes to develop in the near future.

6

Principle 4:
We consult our field staff when we develop human resource policy

We recognise that we must implement, monitor and continuously develop our human resource policies in consultation with the people who work for us. We aim to include field personnel in this process, whether they are full-time, part-time, temporary, short-term or long-term members of our staff.

KEY INDICATORS

- The agency consults field staff when it develops or reviews human resource policies that affect them.
- Field managers and staff understand the scope of consultation and how to participate.
- Field managers and staff may be represented in consultations by recognised trade unions or staff associations.
- Results of policy reviews are recorded in writing and communicated to field managers, field staff and their representatives.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

It is accepted in any employment sphere, that whatever the size of an organisation and whether it is unionised or non-unionised, staff can only perform well if they know their duties, obligations and rights and have an opportunity of making their views known to management on issues that affect them.

Communication is the interchange of ideas, consultation the process by which managers and staff or their representatives jointly examine issues before decisions are made. The two are closely related. Poor communication has been found to be one of the major causes of workplace stress among expatriate aid staff.

Communication and consultation are often made harder by physical distance, the time-frame of contracts and the priorities of short-term projects. Yet both are central to effective people and project management and consistent with the emphasis most agencies place on participation and accountability. However long or short their contracts, field staff views, information and experience are valuable.

Policies that are well-informed and widely understood are more likely to go into effective practice. If field staff themselves cannot participate directly in meetings about issues that affect them, consultation should involve their elected representatives in recognised trade unions or staff associations. It is important to involve field staff or their representatives in consultations: head office programme staff usually work under different terms and conditions, so they and their representatives may have a different perspective and different priorities.

If major decisions are usually made without the participation of those they affect, staff may be unwilling to participate in joint meetings on other matters that urgently require their attention.

Ask the family: policy making at Tear Fund

Tear Fund has no field offices. It recruits specialist staff from the UK who share the agency's Christian ethic, then seconds them to partner organisations in approximately 20 countries. Here they may work in areas as diverse as environmental health or handicrafts marketing, or in emergency relief projects.

Tear Fund seeks field staff ideas on a range of issues. These can be one-off personnel problems, such as how to simplify a cumbersome system of overseas expenses claims. At a policy level, all 70 field staff were consulted in 1996 on proposed long-term changes to field strategy. Their ideas had major implications for existing recruitment policy and, in particular, the length and type of field staff assignment.

The agency subsequently decided it should also include their children in this process. It asked the children of field staff who were now back in the UK how they had felt about being apart from their parents during school terms. This helped the agency gauge the longer-term effects of separation on them and their families. As a result, Tear Fund is now also considering how to provide briefing and debriefing sessions for children as well as for their parents.

Field staff were also asked to comment as Tear Fund changed to a flatter, less hierarchical organisational structure. Written information was sent to the field, comments were invited and face-to-face discussions were held during head office and field visits.

Human resources staff acknowledge that communication by letter or fax meant field staff were not always in the thick of discussions held by UK management and staff at this time. Nevertheless, some field staff and local partner agency staff joined in a series of agency-wide group discussions that contributed to the new 10-year strategy.

It can be difficult to involve people working overseas, says a senior personnel manager at Tear Fund, but you cannot just send people a *fait accompli*. Implementing new policies is not easy either, he adds, but in the long run the process will become easier if you have sought the opinions of field workers at an early stage.

Principle 5:
Plans and budgets reflect our responsibilities towards our field staff

We recognise that the effectiveness and success of our field operations depend on the contribution of all the salaried, contract or volunteer staff involved in them. Operational plans and budgets aim to reflect fully our responsibilities for staff management, support, development, security and well-being.

KEY INDICATORS

- All staff and their families moving country or region have a health check and specific health advice before their field assignment starts.
- Briefing before an assignment includes training in any areas essential for the safe, effective accomplishment of key tasks by field staff.
- Field staff and their families moving country or region receive information and advice about the location in which they will live and work.
- Work plans are based on an average maximum 48-hour working week. Time off and leave periods during assignments are mandatory.
- Staff who move country or region have paid leave after or between assignments.
- All staff have a debriefing or exit interview at the end of their assignment. Staff who move country or region receive a standard offer of a health check, personal counselling and career advice. Families are offered a health check and personal counselling.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Agencies rightly feel they must respond as quickly as possible to fill field staff vacancies. However, good briefing and preparation particularly of personnel who work abroad, is seen as essential by employers whose staff work in situations less complex than those faced by relief and development personnel.

A briefing package that introduces staff to the organisation and provides essential training, health checks and health advice is cheap compared to the total cost of employing an individual. For UK employers of expatriates, contract costs can average two to three times those of equivalent posts at home. Staff and their families, particularly those working abroad for the first time or in a new region, need information and an opportunity to discuss implications and provision. Good preparation and briefing mean more realistic expectations of agency and project, less culture shock, less risk of illness, injury or early termination of contract.

An end-of-assignment or debriefing interview is the opportunity for agency and individual to learn from field experience. These interviews should assess change in job profile or support needs and offer personal counselling and career advice to staff who have moved country or region. Making these offers standard increases the likelihood that staff will take up the offer, and do so without fear or embarrassment.

Relief work, in particular, takes place against a background of unforeseen circumstance and abnormal schedule. Yet *Room For Improvement* found that half of all expatriate relief and development field workers questioned *routinely* worked more than 60 hours a week. More than a quarter worked over 70 hours a week.

Field staff are also part of family or social networks essential for their well-being. Excessive working hours contribute to job-related illness, stress, accidents and problems in reconciling work and personal life. Agencies in which people regularly work long hours display altruism and dedication. They do not always demonstrate realistic expectations, good people management, or concern for the well-being and rights of staff and their families.

Investing in field people: briefing new staff at Voluntary Service Overseas

The development agency Voluntary Service Overseas holds induction courses for new field staff three times a year. Each course is designed for 16 expatriate and host country programme management staff who travel to Britain from Africa, Asia, the Pacific and Caribbean. The course is up to four weeks long, most of it conducted in-house by VSO staff.

VSO introduces new field staff to the agency and their job through a three-week core programme that mixes formal briefing sessions, hands-on exercises, social gatherings, and one-to-one meetings. It ensures field staff are familiar with the agency's in-house systems, including volunteer recruitment and support, and financial and database management. Staff moving country receive travel and payroll information and those coming to Britain for the first time receive an introduction to London. The core programme is followed by skills training as necessary in, for example, use of computers or four-wheel drive vehicles.

The agency sees this intensive briefing as a key investment in its field programmes - one that helps ensure new staff are 'up and running' almost from the day they start their new job in the field. It enables field staff to establish links with their new colleagues in London, and helps faces become as familiar as names early in the working relationship.

Responsibilities do not end when an emergency does: the British Red Cross

The British Red Cross has recently changed its approach to stress counselling for the expatriate field staff it recruits on behalf of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. It contracts another British charity, InterHealth, which specialises in health care for people who work abroad, to conduct pre-and post-assignment medical checks and counselling sessions.

Confidential counselling sessions are now offered as standard procedure. Field workers in the aid sector can suffer from a 'tough-guy' culture and a fear of being thought inadequate or unemployable if they ask for help. Delegates are free to decline the offer of counselling and about one percent do. Nevertheless, the agency feels the refusal rate for counselling would be far higher if the offer were not routine.

Debriefing at the end of an assignment has also been restructured. It now includes interviews with a personnel officer to cover human resource issues and their implications, as well as meetings with UK-based managers and technical officers on programme issues. Of common concern to field staff, human resource and programme managers have been the repeated short-term contracts on which nearly all field staff work, and the British Red Cross is now considering ways of retaining experienced delegates between assignments.

8

Principle 6:

We provide appropriate training and support

We recognise that we must provide relevant training and support to help staff work effectively and professionally. We aim to give them appropriate personal and professional support and development before, during and after their field assignments.

KEY INDICATORS

- Project plans and budgets are explicit about training provision. Field staff and managers understand agency and individual responsibility for meeting training needs.
- Line managers know how to assess the training and development needs of field staff before, during and at the end of assignments.
- The agency monitors the effectiveness of its training and development support in meeting:
  - corporate and programme aims
  - field staff expectations of fairness and transparency
  - equal opportunities targets.
- Where possible, the agency links training and development to external qualifications.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

For some agencies, training and staff development are low priorities: they see the need to maximise resources to project beneficiaries as one that outweighs the need to train or develop project staff.

The expertise of field staff is itself a valuable resource. The majority of staff recruited in Britain for field programmes are people with professional qualifications in health, education, engineering and other areas of expertise. Yet, however well-qualified they may be in their chosen specialisation, field staff are expected to undertake a wider range of tasks, in project settings that are unfamiliar or complex. They frequently assume increased responsibility and work with teams of colleagues who may be specialists in other areas.

The purpose of training is to enable staff to carry out the job in hand. Training can mean informal or formal learning. It can focus on information essential for specific programmes, such as refugee health or adult literacy, or cover generic management topics: team building, negotiating skills, and project management. Ultimately, whatever its focus and however it is conducted, the aim of assessing individuals and providing them with appropriate training is consistent with the need to make maximum use of the expertise and resources they bring to field programmes.

Staff development helps them and the agencies that employ them realise potential. It supports staff who want to take on new tasks or responsibilities gain new skills or build on existing experience. It also helps agencies adapt to new circumstances, change the focus of programmes or the profile and opportunity of their workforce. Linking staff development and training to vocational or professional qualifications helps to ensure that achievement is recognised both inside and outside the aid sector. This is particularly important when career paths are not always clear.

But if some agencies under-estimate its contribution, others risk viewing training as the only solution when field programmes are not as effective as they might be. Effectiveness, like quality, is a chain that needs to link all activities as an organisation strives to achieve its goals. If the chain becomes broken at any point, by a system, a person or a piece of equipment that fails to work well, this failure will eventually find its way to the interface where the organisation meets its clients - or, in the case of aid programmes - project beneficiaries. Training field staff may not be the right answer if problems that become evident in the field are caused by failings elsewhere in the 'chain'.

Staff development and equal opportunity at Oxfam

In addition to locally-held budgets, Oxfam's International Division holds a central staff development fund. This was set up in 1994 to provide money for staff development when no other sources of funding are available. It focuses on support to women and to field staff from non-OECD countries, particularly those who want to compete for management positions. This is because equal opportunities monitoring shows that these groups are currently under-represented at management level in the agency.

Though total funding available is modest, Oxfam feels it important to monitor its take-up, purpose and impact in order to ensure the Fund's objectives are met and to make recommendations for the future. During 1995-6 the Fund provided allocations to 18 staff members, the majority women, from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the UK. Applicants have to demonstrate that their proposal has clear learning objectives, is cost-effective and has the support of their line manager.

Staff development activities during 1995-96 included short and full-time courses, distance learning, including an Open University course, and visiting other Oxfam offices to learn from the experience and perspective of colleagues. The agency firmly believes that learning and development do not automatically mean taking formal courses, but stresses that alternatives, such as visits, secondments or 'shadowing' a colleague, must be carefully planned and structured.

In a brief annual report, international human resources staff sum up the experience of Fund recipients in both quantitative and qualitative terms. They note promotions, enhanced responsibility and self-confidence or even, in the case of one recipient subsequently made redundant, the ability to find a new job.

9

Principle 7:
We take all reasonable steps to ensure staff security and well-being

We recognise that the work of relief and development agencies often places great demands on staff in conditions of complexity and risk. We take all reasonable steps to ensure the security and well-being of staff and their families.

KEY INDICATORS

- Programme plans include written assessment of security and health risks specific to country or region.
- Before the assignment begins, field staff and families accompanying them receive oral and written briefing on country or regional security, emergency evacuation procedures and insurance arrangements.
- Briefing before an assignment includes training in the use and maintenance of any vehicle, equipment or procedure essential to personal, family and team safety and security. Briefings are updated in the field when new vehicles or equipment are purchased or procedures amended.
- The agency maintains records of work-related injuries, accidents and fatalities, and uses these records to help assess and reduce future risk to field staff.
- Security, health, insurance provision and emergency evacuation procedures are regularly reviewed. Briefings and information to staff are updated when procedures are amended.
- Field staff and families accompanying them know how to identify health risks in the country or region, how to protect against illness, injury and stress, and how to obtain support or medical treatment including support following incidents that cause distress.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

A measure of risk and stress may be unavoidable in field programmes. Nevertheless, agencies have a duty of care to field staff, and there is much that can be done to minimise risks to them and their families from the consequences of illness, injury, stress or burn-out, while ensuring that field programmes are sustainable.

All field programme plans, whether they emphasise emergency relief or development, must weigh up whether the benefits to the local population of an agency presence outweigh the risks to which field staff are exposed.

Security and health risk assessment should cover availability of health facilities and the need for appropriate levels of insurance. Assessment should also cover the availability of counselling, pastoral or peer group support. This support can help staff and managers who witness events that are profoundly disturbing by normal standards, or who work in environments where danger, distress and sudden death are the norm.

Two of the main sources of risk and stress among expatriate field staff - security issues and bearing witness to suffering - are usually associated with emergency relief programmes. However, they are also a feature of development programmes in unstable or unpredictable regions. In any aid programme, security and health risk assessment and the use of injury, accident and fatality records should inform field staff recruitment processes, health briefings and pre-assignment training.

As well as keeping security and emergency evacuation procedures under active review, attention is required to more routine health & safety measures: ensuring car seat-belts or motorcycle crash helmets are used, for example, or aiming to ensure that accommodation is functional and affords acceptable levels of privacy.

International relief and development agencies share an ethic that stresses universal health, welfare and humanitarian values. Endorsing the People in Aid Code means including field staff in those institutional values too.

Two-way communications: security briefing at the Save the Children Fund

The Save the Children Fund takes a comprehensive and practical approach to field staff health, safety and security in its manual *Safety First*, published in 1995. All the same, the agency emphasises that every situation is different. So whatever agency policies are set, the onus is always on the country programme director to review security needs, develop guidelines and brief field staff accordingly.

At one end of the scale, guidelines must cover local and individual safety, e.g. the time, equipment and care a staff member should expect to take when travelling from A to B. At the other end of the scale, they must set out how to evacuate all or part of a country team, in line with agency policy, if a political or military situation threatens their lives.

New field staff are advised about local security during one-to-one briefings with their country director and line manager. In an insecure situation or during the build-up to an emergency, team briefings may need to be held every day or even more often. As one Save the Children senior programme manager stresses, "You cannot spend enough time sharing information. And you must ensure that guidelines, like policy, are clear and transparent."

But briefing a new team member or updating field staff on a changing situation is not just about talking to them, he says. It is about listening too: giving people the opportunity to ask about the issues that are important to them, and understanding why. "It's normal to be frightened," says the same manager, 'but one thing people mustn't be frightened of is asking you questions. You must never forget that people are individuals and they will be affected differently by the same situation. Managing people during, say, the evacuation of a field team, means you have to be as much aware of those differences as of the mechanics of getting them into a car or onto a 'plane'.

Appendix 1

The People in Aid Steering Group

Action Health	Ian Harper
British Red Cross	Paul Emes, Anna Salma
International Health Exchange	Isobel McConnan
Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture	Jane Shackman
Overseas Development Administration	Roger Clarke
Oxfam	Goldie Prince
RedR	Bobby Lambert
Relief and Rehabilitation Network, ODI	Laura Gibbons
Returned Volunteer Action	Tammy Walker
Save the Children Fund	Maggie Reid
Tear Fund	David Talbot
Independent member	Jennifer Loughlin

Appendix 2

Special Thanks

Bert Griffin, ACAS • Jo Barnett, British Quality Foundation • Lizzie Bell and James Fennell, CARE • Liz Joyce, Concern • Bill Shaw, Cranfield Trust • James Davidson, HelpAge International • Philippe Dind, International Committee of the Red Cross • Willy McCourt, Institute of Development Policy and Management, University of Manchester • Dr Ted Lankester and Dr Rob Morris, InterHealth • Professor Jon Rhodes, Liverpool University • Dr Michael Peel, Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture • Rhian Cadvan-Jones, Janet Sly and Alison Crowder, Oxfam • Craig Stein, PLAN International • Koenraad van Brabant, Relief and Rehabilitation Network, ODI • Peter Hawkins, Save the Children Fund • Gary Colvin, Tear Fund • Kathy Moore, Voluntary Service Overseas • Nick Cater, Words and Pictures

Appendix 3

Sources and Further information

ACAS (The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) and ACAS Reader Ltd, PO Box 16, Earl Shilton, Leicester LE9 8ZZ, ACAS Advisory Booklets series, including *Employment Policies* (1994) and *Employee communications and consultation* (1994)

Burke, Rory (1993) *Project Management*, John Wiley, Chichester

CES (Charity Evaluation Services) (1994) *Quality Assurance in the Voluntary Sector*, Rowan Astbury, 1, Motley Avenue, Christina Street, London EC2A 4SU

Daycare Trust (1992) *The Family-Friendly Employer, Examples from Europe*, Christine Hogg and Lisa Harker, in association with Families and Work Institute, New York, from The Daycare Trust, Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC2B 5AU

Directory of Social Change, 24 Stephenson Way, London NW1 2DP, *Managing People* (1995) Gill Taylor and Christine Thornton, and *Managing Recruitment and Selection* (1996) Gill Taylor

Equal Opportunities Commission, Overseas House, Quay Street, Manchester M3 3H, including *Equal Opportunities: Ten Point Plan for Employers*

Institute of Management Foundation, Cottingham Road, Corby, Northamptonshire NN17 1TT *Checklist* series including 'Planning Overseas Assignments' (006)

Institute of Personnel Development, 35 Camp Road, Wimbledon, London SW19 4UX

International Health Exchange (1992), 8-10 Dryden Street, London WC2E 9NA, *Recruiting Health Workers for Emergencies and Disaster Relief in Developing Countries : Report of a Survey*, London

International Health Exchange and People in Aid (1997) *The Human Face of Aid: A study of recruitment by international relief and development organisations in the UK*

International Labour Organisation, Vincent House, Vincent Square, London SW1P 2NB

InterAction (1996) *NGO Field Cooperation Protocol*, the American Council for Voluntary International Action, 1717 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 801, Washington, DC 20036, USA

Investors in People UK, 7-10 Chandos Street, London W1M 9DE, including *The Investors in People Standard* (1995)

Kozak, Marion (1991) 'Childcare Dividends' in *Childcare Now*, No. 3, 1991

Labour Research Department (1994) *Stress At Work: A Trade Union Response*, from LRD Publications, 78 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8HF

NCVO (1994) *Management Standards and The Voluntary Sector*, Sean Baine et al, and *Training for the Voluntary Sector* (1995) Les Hems et al., Regent's Wharf, 8 All Saints Street, London N1 9RL

Pickard, Jane (1996) 'Stopping disaster from ruining lives' in *People Management*, 25 July 1996

Relief and Rehabilitation Network (1996) *Network Paper 16,* 'The Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda: Study III Principal Findings and Recommendations', Overseas Development Institute, London

Relief and Rehabilitation Network (1995) *Network Paper 10,* 'Room for Improvement : The Management and Support of Relief and Development Workers', Rebecca Macnair, Overseas Development Institute, London

Relief and Rehabilitation Network (1994) *Network Paper 7,* 'Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief', Overseas Development Institute, London

Save the Children (1995) *Safety First: protecting NGO employees who work in areas of conflict*, Mark Cutts and Alan Dingle, London

Storey, John (ed.) (1995) *Human Resource Management: a critical text*, Routledge, London
(1989) *New Perspectives on Human Resource Management*, Routledge

The Health & Safety Executive, Health & Safety Information Centre, Broad Lane, Sheffield S3 7HQ including *Stress In The Workplace: A Guide For Employers* (1995)

The Industrial Society, Robert Hyde House, 48 Bryanston Square, London W1H 7LN *Managing Best Practice* series, including 'Recruitment and Selection' (04) and 'Induction' (10) The Industrial Society, London 1996

UMIST (School of Management, University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology) (1995), in association with the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) Employee Relocation Council and The Centre for International Briefing, *Assessment, Selection and Preparation for Expatriate Assignments*

UNICEF (1996 draft) *The Convention on the Rights of the Child: implications for the conduct of professionals and the organisational culture of relief agencies working in complex humanitarian emergencies*

Wilkinson, Brenda (1992) 'Implementing Equal Opportunities' in *EOR* No 46. Nov/Dec 1992

RRN

Background

The Relief and Rehabilitation Network (RRN) was conceived in 1992 and launched in 1994 as a mechanism for professional information exchange in the expanding field of humanitarian aid. The need for such a mechanism was identified in the course of research undertaken by Overseas Development Institute (ODI) on the changing role of NGOs in relief and rehabilitation operations and was developed in consultation with other Networks operated within ODI. Since April 1994, the RRN has regularly produced publications in three different formats: Good Practice Reviews, Network Papers and Newsletters. The RRN is now in its second three-year phase (end 1996-end 1999), supported by four new donors - DANIDA, ECHO, the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and ODA. Over the three year phase, the RRN will seek to expand its reach and relevance amongst humanitarian agency personnel and to further promote good practice.

Objective

To improve aid policy and practice as it is applied in complex political emergencies.

Purpose

To contribute to individual and institutional learning by encouraging the exchange and dissemination of information relevant to the professional development of those engaged in the provision of humanitarian assistance.

Activities

To commission, publish and disseminate analysis and reflection on issues of good practice in policy and programming in humanitarian operations, primarily in the form of written publications.

Target audience

Individuals and organisations actively engaged in the provision of humanitarian assistance at national and international, field-based and head office level in the 'North' and 'South'.

The Relief and Rehabilitation Network is supported by: