



ISO 9001:2000 supports humanitarian aid NGO's expansion in Asia

The QMS developed by the Cambodia Trust to support its humanitarian aid activities there is supporting the launch of new operations in Sri Lanka and East Timor. The benefits include sustainability, accountability, knowledge management, local capacity building and transfer of know-how. The conclusion: "ISO 9001:2000 is emerging as a tool for South-South cooperation in international development."



by **Eoghan Walsh**

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The Cambodia Trust was one of the first nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) to achieve ISO 9001:2000 certification (see "NGO specialized in aid to landmine victims finds benefits in ISO 9001:2000", *IMS* March/April 2004).

Established in 1989 by a group from the United Kingdom, it now runs three rehabilitation centres in Cambodia for the victims of anti-personnel mines, as well as other amputees, providing artificial limbs, orthopaedic braces and mobility aids, as well as physiotherapy and community-based rehabilitation. It also operates an internationally recognized School of Prosthetics and Orthotics in Cambodia to train the next generation of local health professionals from across the region.

ISO 9001:2000 was adopted in part to ensure the sustainability of the organization once the running is transferred to the local Cambodian staff. This has allowed the parent organization to seed two new operations in



Signing ceremony of the Memorandum of Understanding for the Sri Lanka School of Prosthetics and Orthotics (SLSP0). Seated, from left: Mr. Carson Harte, International Director, the Cambodia Trust; Mr. Shuichi Ono, Executive Director, The Nippon Foundation; Mr. Ranjith Maligaspe, Permanent Secretary; Dr. Kahandaliyanage, Director General of Health Services. Standing, first left, the Honorary Nimal Siripala de Silva, Sri Lanka's Minister for Health.

Sri Lanka and East Timor this past year. Having adopted a formal quality management system (QMS) has helped in a number of ways in the setting up of the new centres.

Compatibility of administration

The parent organization in the United Kingdom is concerned

mainly with project development, fund-raising and financial control. The financial reporting systems which evolved with the Cambodian organization have been formalized into work procedures as part of the ISO 9001:2000 implementation process.

These systems are now being adopted, with some modifications, in the new centres in Sri



Dr. Peter Carey and members of the KIPA – an advisory committee formed to provide local input to the East Timor project. (Photo: Susan Schulman.)

Lanka and East Timor, providing a uniform reporting system. In addition, the adoption of work procedures from Cambodia for device manufacture and staff training, as well as patient treatment and liaison, will help the new centres become operational quickly.

A process to share improvements to work practices between the organizations is to be developed

In the future, this will also facilitate the transfer of staff between the centres in different countries due to shared work practices. A process to share improvements to work practices between the organizations is to be developed.

Developing local capacity

While the Cambodian ISO 9001:2000 documentation provides a strong foundation for the new programmes in Sri Lanka and East Timor, it is by

no means an out-of-the-box solution. Staff at the new centres still have to develop their own capacity in language and business skills. It is this process – which initially may appear as an additional cost – that is one of the real benefits of ISO 9001:2000 certification.

The local and foreign staff work together in developing and implementing the QMS. This enables the transfer of skills to local staff in terms of writing reports, setting objectives and stimulating a certain culture in the organization – in this case, of continual improvement.

It is these skills that will be of critical importance in the successful transfer of the organization to local staff, giving them the ability to report back to donors, and to interact with governments and international organizations.

Accountability

An NGO adopting ISO 9001:2000 is a statement to donors: “We invest in our management

Repercussions of tsunami on Sri Lanka project

Sri Lanka was one of the countries hardest hit by the tsunami that devastated South East Asia on 26 December 2004 so ISO Management Systems asked the Cambodia Trust what effect this would have on its plans to expand its operations to Sri Lanka.

Carson Harte, International Director, replied: “Our organization is not getting into the emergency relief – it is simply not our mission – but the management of our project will take on board the changing conditions and will react accordingly.

“For example, we will review the increased need for rehabilitation services and will build that into the project review, possibly

bringing forward the establishment of our training clinic and so increasing the capacity of the country to deal with an expected increase in the number of new amputees as a result of the trauma.

“Our ISO 9001:2000 management systems demand that we seek factual evidence on which to base our decisions, seek consensus with our partners and use our resources well. Having robust systems will help these processes.”

Carson Harte, International Director, Cambodia Trust.

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systems so as to make the optimal use of the funding you give us. We have designed and implemented procedures to communicate back to you what we are doing.” This is important in a climate where there are an increasing number of NGO’s competing for funding, but no standard way of identifying the best run and most effective organizations.

There is increasing scrutiny of the activities of NGO’s and charges that NGO’s are not sufficiently accountable – both “downwards” to beneficiaries and “upwards” to donors. ISO 9001:2000 sees both these groups as external customers

and, to quote the standard: *Top management shall ensure that customer requirements are determined and are met with the aim of enhancing customer satisfaction.*

NGO staff tend to be hard-working and passionate about their work, but may sometimes neglect to question beneficiaries in depth about their complex and changing needs. Equally, beneficiaries may be slow to offer feedback or constructive criticism to NGO’s on how they go about their work.

The standard specifies that *The organization shall determine ... requirements not stated by the*



Disabled people in Timor are isolated by lack of rehabilitation services available, poor transport and discrimination based on cultural beliefs.
(Photo: Susan Schulman.)



The first Sri Lankan graduates from the Cambodian School of Prosthetics and Orthotics (CSPO) have now returned to Sri Lanka to take up the profession, working in the rehabilitation centre at Ragama.

customer but necessary for specified or intended use, where known. A questionnaire conducted among the beneficiaries of the Trust in Cambodia revealed a number of

issues to be addressed. Once management was aware of these, some were quite easily dealt with, while others required more concerted and long term efforts.

In terms of accountability to donors, by virtue of having ISO 9001:2000 certification, an NGO shows donors it has achieved the “the mark of distinction”. This obviously carries weight, as show by the generous reactions of the Nippon Foundation and other donors to the Trust’s certification in terms of additional grant aid.

In addition, the improvements to the internal financial reporting systems due to the ISO 9001:2000 process, and the common reporting format across the Trust’s field organizations, makes reporting to donors by the head office simpler and more transparent.

Sustainability

Using ISO 9001:2000 as a capacity-building tool has helped the Cambodia Trust hand over its operations to the local Cambodian staff. It is also emerging as a useful tool for cloning the operations of the Trust in new locations.

The Trust hopes to be able to hand over the new operations in five to nine years. Three of the Cambodian staff have qualified as Lead Auditors and will be able to help in gaining certification for East Timor and Sri Lanka. It is heartening to see ISO 9001:2000 – often viewed as a very “Western” management system – emerging as a tool for South-South cooperation in international development.

The new project in Sri Lanka and the transfer of skills from Cambodia will have a marked impact on the lives of those who will require long-term rehabilitation in the wake of the recent tsunami.

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Replicability

Development work is slow, hard and complex. When you find a model that works, as the Cambodia Trust seems to have done, it makes sense to replicate it where possible. ISO 9001:2000 is a tool that allows the careful documentation of a process and its iterative nature encourages describing processes as they really are – rather than as they *should* be – giving an accurate manual of operations.

Many NGO’s find themselves tackling the same, or similar, problems in different locations. A quality manual can be a rich repository of the expert knowledge the personnel of each NGO builds up. By codifying this knowledge in a quality manual, expertise can be retained, refined and modified as NGO’s replicate their success in new and needy communities.

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Dr. Peter Carey, East Timor Project Facilitator (and Cambodia Trust co-founder) with local patrons.