

Humanitarian Action Harvesting

SIETAR EUROPA Congress, Sofia 2007



**A workshop by
Jonathan Levy,
Charaf Moulali &
Isabelle Demangeat**

SIETAR
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Enfants du Monde
DROITS DE L'HOMME
CHILDREN OF THE WORLD - HUMAN RIGHTS


SIETAR-France
Société pour l'Éducation, la Formation
et la Recherche Interculturelles

Humanitarian Action Harvesting



The “Humanitarian issues and the intercultural community” session brought out the breadth and depth of our field of knowledge and the many competencies we have to offer to humanitarian causes. The values of respect of diversity and dignity which bind us together as a community are vital to share with NGOs as Charaf Moulali expressed how intercultural thinking needs to be at the very core of the ethics of humanitarian work. Many NGOs are the front line workers dealing with devastating human crisis, often the results of economic and social domination, prejudice, discrimination, racism, and genocide .We thank you for joining us in helping to contribute to make their work more successful and meaningful.

Jonathan Levy
Chair, NGO Committee



Humanitarian Action Harvesting

Aid programs are implemented in different cultures. The uses and practices of interculturality is that they are always contextual cultural practices. If so, one must consider the problem of contexts.

The humanitarian action always takes place in a complex frame/environment. The situations in which it is engaged cannot give place to models. It is the reason for which it is difficult, in this particular field, to elaborate rules that can be valid universally.

To sum up the presentation I have made in Sofia, I would say that the humanitarian ethic means saving the lives of those most in need and at the same time respecting the dignity of each individual who has fallen victim to armed conflict, famine, disease or natural disasters. This is where I see a major role for SIETAR Movement: helping the Humanitarian organizations to integrate/operationalize the interculturality in their policy as a core value to better understand the perception and needs of the beneficiaries and national communities.

Enfants du Monde – Droits de l'Homme [EMDH] – thanks to SIETAR France section has started the change of its policy.

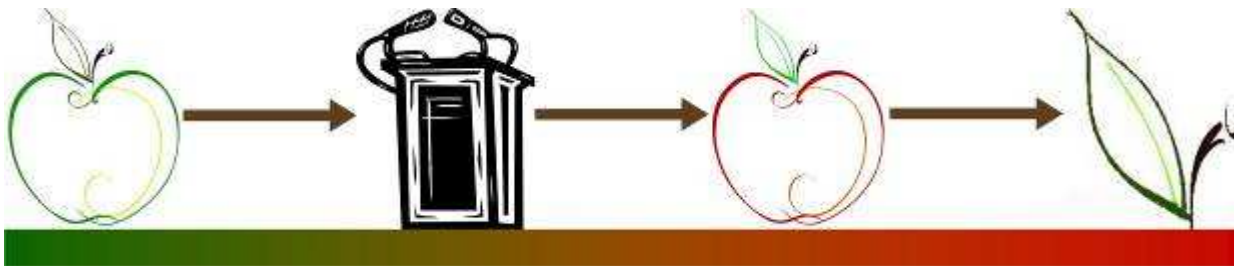


Charaf Moulali
Délégué Général/General Director
Enfants du Monde - Droits de l'Homme – EMDH
Children of the World – Human Rights

The Workshop



The Humanitarian Action Harvesting Workshop conceived by Charaf Moulali and Jonathan Levy took place during the 2007 SIETAR congress in Sofia. As shown in the following pages, the workshop, led by Isabelle Demangeat, was based on four stages : green apples, presentations, red apples and leaves.



Stage One: Green Apples



To begin the workshop, delegates were placed into groups and asked to “brainstorm” ideas surrounding the reciprocal contributions possible between interculturalists and humanitarian actors. These were written on to green apples before being placed on a giant tree. The results are found on the following page.



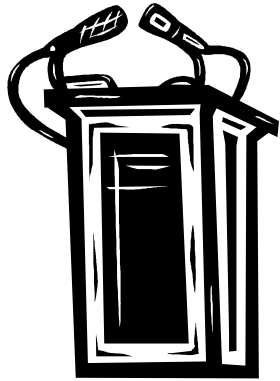
What Humanitarian workers can offer Interculturalists...

- 🍏 New market and research field
- 🍏 Dialogue is not enough, leads to action
- 🍏 Humanitarian workers can provide a reality check for interculturalists of how far training can go
- 🍏 Dialogue could increase curiosity and reduce prejudices on both sides
- 🍏 Exchange of hard facts and soft facts
- 🍏 Networking between companies and humanitarian organizations
- 🍏 Deeper understanding of social processes for interculturalists and humanitarian organizations
- 🍏 Sustainable mutual learning
- 🍏 Encourage people in companies to interpret aspects of social impacts
- 🍏 Helping address issues related to immigration
- 🍏 Learning and sharing better practices
- 🍏 Contribute strategic and social skills
- 🍏 SIETAR : from professional development to a trusted advisor/network for all
- 🍏 Humanitarian gain
- 🍏 Interdisciplinary dialogue has potential of more meaningful outcomes that can be truly implemented
- 🍏 Expansion of interculturalism
- 🍏 Transfer of knowledge between NGO and research
- 🍏 Broadening perspectives, inspiration and mutual understanding
- 🍏 From competition to benefit for all
- 🍏 Increasing awareness (corporate, educational environments)
- 🍏 Teaching interculturalists humanitarian ethics
- 🍏 Learning new behaviour for relevant action
- 🍏 Changing perspectives (mutual)

What Interculturalists can offer Humanitarian workers ...

- 🍏 Generating creative solutions for higher success rate
- 🍏 Mediation to dialogue
- 🍏 Identify the right channels for financial and other aid
- 🍏 Dialogue could increase curiosity and reduce prejudices on both sides
- 🍏 Exchange of hard facts and soft facts
- 🍏 Networking between companies and humanitarian organizations
- 🍏 Deeper understanding of social processes for interculturalists and humanitarian organizations
- 🍏 Sustainable mutual learning
- 🍏 Communicating local culture
- 🍏 Interculturalist gain
- 🍏 Interdisciplinary dialogue has potential of more meaningful outcomes that can be truly implemented
- 🍏 SIETAR : provides research and tools
- 🍏 Knowledge transfer in the field of power issue
- 🍏 Transfer of knowledge between NGO and research
- 🍏 Better quality, more effective and efficient humanitarian aid
- 🍏 Broadening perspectives, inspiration and mutual understanding
- 🍏 Interculturalists can help develop a more holistic approach to support pre-departure, and return , but also support for processes during humanitarian projects
- 🍏 From competition to benefit for all
- 🍏 Increasing efficiency of NGOs and self-fulfilment
- 🍏 Self-culture awareness
- 🍏 Teaching humanitarians how to interact with corporate culture
- 🍏 Learning and sharing better practices
- 🍏 Changing perspectives (mutual)

Stage Two: Presentations



Only once the green apples had been completed did the presentations begin.

Consisting of a presentation by Jonathan Levy on the design and delivery of a 3 day workshop: *Mediation and intercultural approaches* by the Sietar France team for EMDH's Reception centre of foreign isolated children. A short video was shown on this project.



This was followed by an address by Charaf Moulali entitled "*The Intercultural & Humanitarian Aid – An Ethical Approach*," this stage aimed to provide further insight into possible relationships between the two fields. Charaf's text is found on the following pages.

Intercultural & Humanitarian Aid - An Ethical Approach -

Why speak about the Intercultural
when we speak about Ethics and Humanitarian Aid?


Humanitarian action is based on principles and strong values, among which is included the principle of "humanity".

Aid programs are implemented in countries of different cultures. The use and practice of interculturality is always a contextual cultural practice. And so, one must consider the issue of **contexts**. In what contexts do we use the intercultural?

I believe that one must ask what from which context we come, how we see ourselves in this context, and above all, from what social, political, religious, and ethical view point we read this context.

A humanitarian action often takes place in complex environments where standard models cannot be simply reproduced. Therefore, it is difficult to elaborate rules that are universally valid.

The humanitarian framework of an action is at the same time spatial and historic, political and economic, cultural and legal. It also demands mediation techniques and involves systems of representation that each person has of the "Other."




Aid is provided by committed actors using standard technical tools in a context where various actors interact: beneficiaries, NGOs, organizations with different mandates (human rights, protection), humanitarian workers, donors (private or public), governmental or inter-governmental organizations, political powers (local, regional and international) and their apparatus (military, economic, diplomatic), private enterprises, cultural and religious authorities, administrations and services, media and so on.

To address this complexity, the humanitarian movement has tried these last ten years to codify and regulate humanitarian actions.

Before describing the major role that intercultural values could play in the humanitarian field, I would like to introduce and summarize the concept and the definition of 'ethics'.

Humanitarian ethics - Concept and definition

Humanitarian ethics is the belief that it is right to help anyone in grave need. This belief is found in every culture and faith, as well as in the political ideology of human rights. The ideas of 'right to life' and 'human dignity' are framed in international humanitarian law, human rights conventions which are the basis of different humanitarian organisations' mandates.



The International Humanitarian Movement is based on principles such as the humanitarian imperative, neutrality, impartiality and non-discrimination, universality, participation of the affected population and respect for culture and customs.

There are a certain number of codes and standards today which frame humanitarian practices. However, there are always situations in which there are no rules. The humanitarian worker is left with his own conscience to take decisions. In these circumstances, ethics are a step which helps the consciousness of each to discern and carry out “the appropriate action”.

The singular dimension of ethics does not mean that collective ethics cannot exist. Ethical principles are also collective referents:

- 📖 When ethics distinguishes the “Right” and the “Wrong”, we call it “the moral”;
- 📖 When a moral is explicit and translated into interdiction, we call it “the law”;
- 📖 When a moral is translated into general principles for a specific group, we call it “a charter”;
- 📖 When the principles of a charter are compulsory with obligations and restrictions, we call it “a code of conduct” or “a code of deontology”.



Ethical principles

To apply humanitarian ethics, humanitarian workers refer to the above described guiding principles commonly accepted by most INGOs – neutrality and independence. By affirming their disinterest in politics, humanitarians hope to gain access to all those in need.

Nevertheless and because effective humanitarian action requires a high degree of competence, many organizations have prioritized technical, financial and logistical management competence over ethical, social and cultural considerations.

I would now like to focus your attention on one of the basic principles on which humanitarian action should be based: the participation of the beneficiaries and the respect of culture and customs.

International humanitarian action is firmly institutionalized. This provides a strong capacity to respond to crises and there is an impressive record of effective action in many countries every year. But there is often little time or indeed commitment to listening and responding to feedback and suggestions of people affected by disaster, or to building on local skills, knowledge and capacities.



One of the main factors contributing to this includes:


🗑️ Lack of understanding of cultural consideration

🗑️ Lack of clarity about the roles and responsibilities of different actors towards each other and towards people affected by disaster;

Ethical humanitarian work is not only about what you intend to do but how well you do it and to whom you are responsible. Yet accountability in the field remains under-developed and under-resourced. Organizations do not use their own principles as a measure of self-evaluation. Being accountable, and proving your essential moral values through your practical performance, is critical to the legitimacy of an INGO.

How are ethics defined and perceived and are ethics natural universal values?

The definition depends much on the perception that we have of what is ethical. That is, how we perceive what is ethical and how this perception motivates certain definitions or gives priority to certain definitions. All definitions we have here are contextual, therefore referring to a context. The problem that arises then is how to link the contextuality of the definition of ethics with interculturality or how intercultural are ethics?



The challenge brings into the dialogue the contextual definitions we have tried to highlight. That is, a dialogue of definitions and seeing whether based on this dialogue we discover that the definitions we have given to the ethics are not fully intercultural.

One can easily admit that cultures are not all organized in the same way and do not all value ethics similarly. With the rationalization of the world, different cultures are gathered together into a common humanity. In doing so, the implicit references are often western ones. So we find ourselves thinking in terms of constructing the “other” inversely in relation to oneself. We find ourselves thinking in terms of opposites, tradition opposed to modernity, cultures as opposed to universality. Thinking in terms of complementarity of differences given that one denies the originality of the “other” is difficult. It is therefore important to abandon this type of dialectic paradigm and keep in mind the various subjectivities and thus undertake a real dialogue with communities.

We should not underestimate our difficulties in understanding the “other”. These difficulties are related not only to the prejudices which we all have, but also to our preconceptions. We tend to look at the “other” from a certain point of view that limits our capacity to understand the “other”.



The “Humanitarian” is also analysed and viewed differently.

Millions of the world's most vulnerable remain beyond the reach of humanitarian assistance and protection.

Saving lives is not sufficient. Respecting people's dignity and livelihoods is equally important. This is where I see a major role for SIETAR Movement: helping the Humanitarian organizations to integrate interculturality and the principles of participation and respect for cultures and customs in their day-to-day activities.

- Humanitarian principles:

📦 Include the two highlighted ethical principles of neutrality and impartiality into all phases of project cycle management (exploratory mission, assessments, project design, implementation and evaluation);

📦 Conduct real-time impact assessments to inform decisions, adapt programs and adjust/react;

📦 Develop field indicators to help put principles into practice;

-Advocate these principles to other actors:


📦 Support national associations which abide by principles;

📦 Build consensus in the field to disseminate principles to: donors (private or public), governmental or inter-governmental organizations, political powers (local, regional and international) and their supports (military, economic, diplomatic), private enterprises, cultural and religious authorities, administrations and services, the media and so on. Hold programs/projects to account on the basis of global impartiality;

📦 Invite donors, United Nations Agencies, host governments, private sector and civil/military units to abide by the principles and adhere to the existing Code of Conduct or develop their own guidelines.

In my opinion, interculturality in the Humanitarian sector (as well as in any other international organisation) should be a core value incorporated into the general policy that positively influences the programming and strategic orientation. This will enhance the way in which we communicate based on tolerance.

I also believe that the debate on interculturality is extremely important because it raises issues about relationships and allows discussion and communication among different cultures.



Finally, I would say that a political attitude should be developed and I believe one must think of the concept of interculturality as a **strategic and political concept**.


It is strategic as it seeks to change the nature of relations among human beings, among cultures. It is known that to achieve change, one still needs objective knowledge of the facts and the reality of cultural relations today.

‘Interculturality’ implies working on the interaction among different cultures. It implies asking what we can do to make living together not just tolerant but fruitful for the various interacting parties.

Programming, Human Resources, Educational, Communicative and other strategies must be based on this premise.

Conclusion

Humanitarian ethics are about saving the lives of those in greatest need. Swamped as we are by statistics, we must also respect the view of every man, woman, and child whose life is shattered by conflict, hunger, disease or disaster. The practice of these ethics remains the greatest challenge.



A balance between the quick delivery of life-saving relief and a form of aid that supports national/local capacities and involves and respects national/local participation is a complex task, calling for sound humanitarian judgement.

There are no simple answers for a complex contextual environment. We can only develop this essential ‘art of humanitarian judgement’ through openly declaring the ethical principles we believe in, trying our best to put them into practice and being prepared to measure the effects, reassessing our decisions on a continual basis.

The legitimacy of the entire humanitarian movement is based on how successfully we are seen to be putting our principles into practice. We need to create an environment in which the key humanitarian value of saving lives with dignity – according to need alone – is widely recognized, understood and prioritized. That means promoting our values with all those who have a stake in humanitarian crises – host authorities, donor governments, development agencies, civil society, military forces, private sector companies and the media.

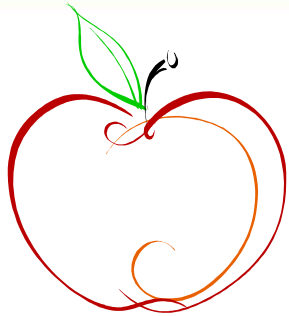
But advocating adherence to humanitarian principles is only part of the story. Crucially, we must put our principles into practice – in partnership with those in need.

“The cries of children throughout the world still linger. They must be heard more and more loudly. Listen to them with us and take action to make change”

Yves Buannic – EMDH Founding President



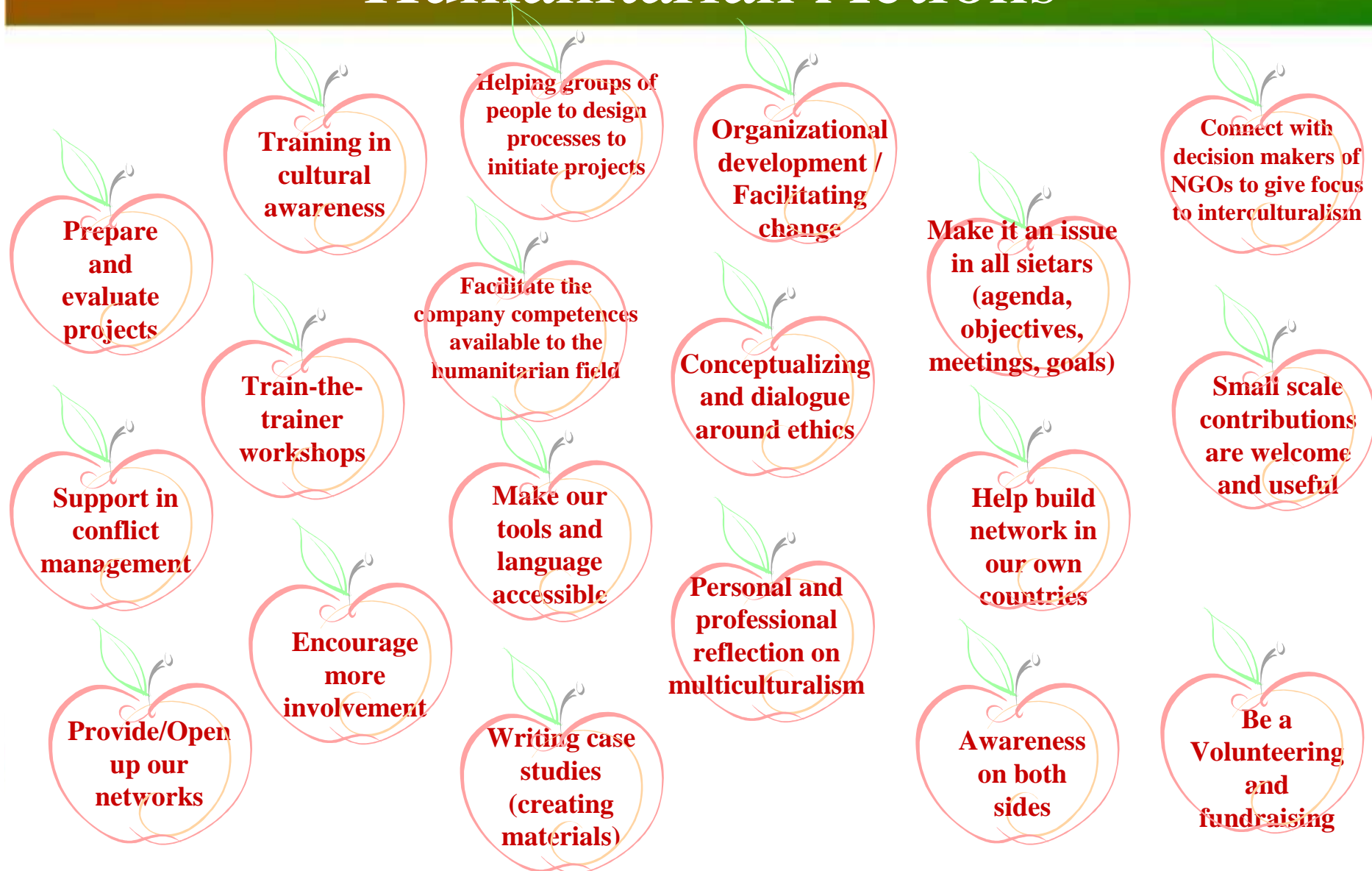
Stage Three: Red Apples



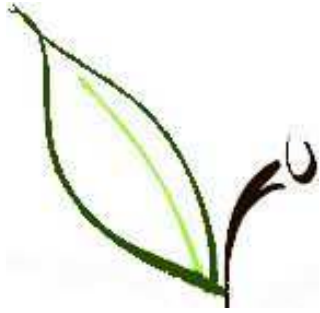
Following the presentation by Charaf, the groups reconvened to again “brainstorm” ideas. This time, the question was what actions interculturalists can bring to humanitarian action. The responses were written on red apples, symbolising maturity in the reflection process, before also being attached to the giant tree. The responses are to be found on the next page.



Interculturalists' Participation in Humanitarian Actions



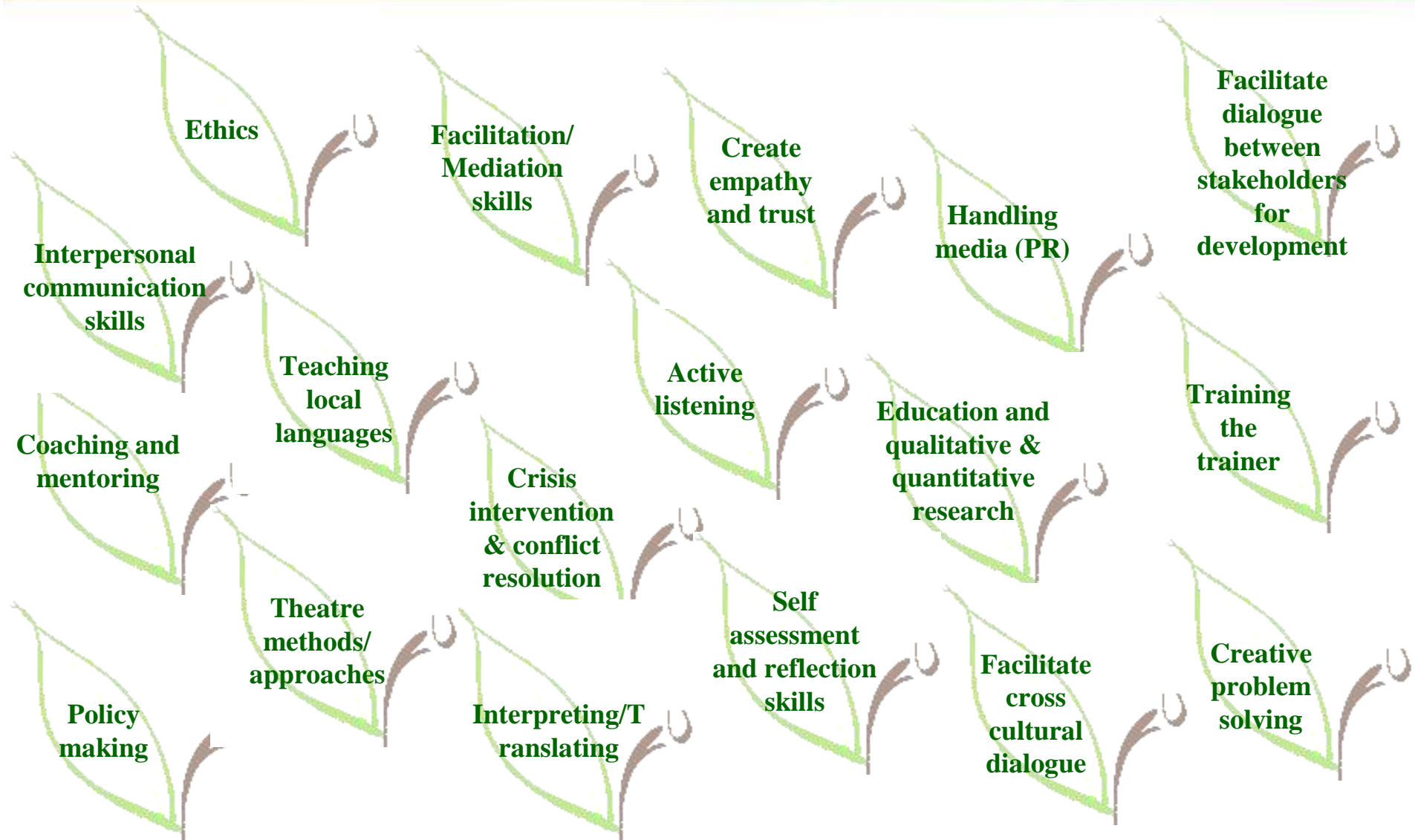
Stage Four: Leaves



Once the reflection on actions had taken place, a second reflection asked what are the skills and competencies that interculturalists can bring to humanitarian actions. The responses to this last stage were written on leaves before being attached to the tree.



Interculturalists' skills for use in Humanitarian actions



Conclusion



Once the green apples, red apples and leaves had been placed on the tree, the delegates were able to reflect on the suggestions made by other groups, creating further dialogue.

Christine Wirth (President Sietar Germany) & Robert Johnson (President Sietar UK) explained future projects and their commitment to these actions.



This photo of the group shows the completed "tree of knowledge" which remained visible throughout the congress, allowing other delegates who had not taken part in the workshop to be able to themselves reflect on the suggestions made by their colleagues.

SIETAR 2008



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