

**Humanitarian  
Outcomes**

# International Dialogue on Strengthening Partnership in Disaster Response: Bridging national and international support

## **BACKGROUND PAPER 2** **Regional and International Initiatives**

An independent team  
of professionals providing  
evidence-based analysis  
and policy consultations  
to governments and  
international organisations  
on their humanitarian  
response efforts.

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# Acronyms

ACAPS	Assessment Capacities Project
AADMER	ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response
ADPC	Asian Disaster Prevention Centre
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
APC-MADRO	Asia-Pacific Conferences on Military Assistance to Disaster Relief Operations
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AU	African Union
BCPR	Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, UNDP
CADRI	Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative
CAP	Consolidated Appeals Process
CAPRADE	Andean Committee for Disaster Prevention and Assistance
CDAC	Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities
CDERA	Caribbean Disaster Emergency Committee
CEPREDENAC	Coordination Center for Natural Disaster Prevention of Central America
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CHF	Common Humanitarian Fund
DRR	Disaster risk reduction
ECB	Emergency Capacity Building
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EERT	ECOWAS Emergency Response Team
EOC	Emergency Operational Center
EPWG	Emergency Preparedness Working Group
ERC	Emergency Relief Coordinator
ERD	Evaluative Reports Database
ERF	Emergency Response Fund
EU	European Union
FA	Flash Appeal
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GFDRR	Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery
GHD	Good Humanitarian Donorship
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
HEWSweb	Humanitarian Early Warning Service Website
HFA	Hyogo Framework for Action
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee for Humanitarian Response
ICHAD	Islamic Conference Humanitarian Affairs Department

ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IEC	INSARAG External Classification
IDRL	International Disaster Response Law
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IGAD	Inter-Governmental Authority on Development
IHP	International Humanitarian Partnership
INEE	Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
ISDR	International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
INGOs	International Non-Governmental Organisations
INSARAG	International Search and Rescue Advisory Group
LAS	League of Arab States
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NDMA	National Disaster Management Authority
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisation
OAS	Organisation of American States
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development Assistance Committee
OIC	Organisation of the Islamic Conference
OSOCC	On-Site Operations Coordination Centre
PAHO	Pan American Health Organisation
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum
PoA	Programme of Action
REDLAC	Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Task Force for Risk, Emergency and Disasters
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SASOP	Regional Standby Arrangement and Standard Operating Procedure
SAR	Search and Rescue
SOPAC	Pacific Islands Applied Geoscience Commission
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDMC	SAARC Disaster Management Centre
SWG	Sub-Working Group
TCG	Tripartite Core Group
UN	United Nations
UNDAC	United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination System
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNISDR	UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
USAR	Urban Search and Rescue
WHO	World Health Organisation

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

In the past several decades, the number and diversity of international actors involved in operations after major natural disasters has grown enormously. While international assistance organisations represent an expression of human solidarity, and an important source of aid for disaster-affected populations, they also present a growing challenge to the affected state. States need to be able to decide when international assistance is most needed and how to coordinate with and regulate it when it is deployed. International actors can sometimes deliver inappropriate relief items, and fail to coordinate with local authorities and international mechanisms, which can effectively block the ‘right’ aid getting through.<sup>1</sup> These challenges have led to an overall lack of trust and confidence between government authorities and international aid actors.

To explore these questions, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) are convening an International Dialogue on Strengthening Partnership in Disaster Response: Bridging national and international support (International Dialogue on Disaster Response). The Dialogue will gather a select group of representatives with overall authority for managing national disaster response and the entry of international assistance to their countries, as well as representatives from select NGOs, the Red Cross/Red Crescent, UN agencies, and regional organisations for a meeting in October 2011. The objective is to stimulate a results-oriented discussion on:

- how affected states can best facilitate international assistance in non-conflict disasters<sup>2</sup> while also ensuring adequate coordination, oversight and quality guarantees; and
- how the international community can better support affected states to fulfil their regulatory and facilitating responsibilities.

In preparation for the Dialogue, an ‘Expert Dialogue’ of technical experts was held in June 2011. This is one of three papers commissioned for these meetings. Its purpose is to provide a summary of some of the key recent international and regional initiatives as they relate to the role and responsibility of the affected state in international disaster response, in particular how the state relates with international actors. It is hoped that this paper helps facilitate discussion by widening the shared knowledge base of participants in the Dialogue.

## 1.2 Findings

This paper’s central observation is that while there have been enormous strides taken to improve the international community’s ability to coordinate and professionalise, these have largely been focused ‘inwards’. Humanitarian

organisations and affected states often seem to operate in parallel ‘silos’, planning initiatives in isolation from one another and sometimes treating one another as an afterthought in the process.. This is problematic and a clear gap. There are some exceptions to this tendency, including at the regional level, where inter-governmental organisations are forming new partnerships for improving disaster response and preparedness in their corner of the world. The IFRC’s IDRL programme offers an important and innovative set of tools for further take-up by governments, and the approach of UNDAC missions and INSARAG serves as a promising model. Another positive example is the partnership between non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government officials working on community-based disaster preparedness.

As described in Paper I there is growing recognition of the need for changes to how international aid and national governments relate to each other in times of disaster. The International Dialogue on Disaster Response is one example of increasing attention to this issue. However, based on this survey of existing initiatives, it is not clear that the international system is really interested in taking this forward. International humanitarian organisations seem to be still largely focused on improving their own near-term operational impact. Increasing attention to the role of the state, in the view of many international actors, risks increasing barriers and jeopardising access to affected populations. In sudden onset disasters, myths persist that there is ‘no time’ for assessing local capacities or working in partnership with government. What is still not sufficiently grasped is that a successful response to a large natural disaster really cannot take place without the state. This is evidenced by the serious shortcomings in the Haiti response, for example, where the state itself was severely impacted by the 2010 earthquake. Furthermore, as the summary below illustrates, regional organisations are, in some areas, rising up to fill a void; international organisations may continue to ignore these initiatives at their peril.

In certain contexts affected by natural disaster, international humanitarian organisations have very legitimate concerns about the government’s commitment and ability to meet people’s needs during crisis. When it a mega disaster strikes, however, no government, not even the best prepared and best resourced, can go it alone. As the following survey illustrates, what is needed is not necessarily more initiatives, but a change in mindset. International humanitarian organisations and governments need to realise that they need each other, and work from this shared understanding to build more trust.

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### **1.3 Scope and structure of this paper**

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In the following section, the paper begins by summarising international initiatives to support states in disaster preparedness and response, including efforts to help states to develop regulatory regimes and capacity for managing international actors. This includes the IFRC’s International Disaster Response Laws, Rules and Principles Programme (IDRL) as well as initiatives by UN OCHA and others to assist states’ in their preparedness and response capacity. Section 3 focuses on the initiatives of regional organisations to support states in responding to disasters, with a focus on

how they coordinate and manage international assistance. Section 4 reviews a wide range of initiatives to ‘self-regulate’, or improve the quality and accountability of (mainly) international-level assistance, such as Sphere and the Code of Conduct, among others. The following section looks at efforts to improve the coordination of international humanitarian assistance, mainly the clusters and the leadership by UN Humanitarian Coordinators. Section 6 summarises important multilateral initiatives at the global level to conduct common needs assessments as well as some of the challenges for assessing national capacities. Finally, Section 7 offers some conclusions on what the range of initiatives say about future possibilities for cooperation between national and international actors in disaster response.

This paper defines ‘humanitarian assistance’ as goods and services provided to meet the immediate needs of disaster-affected communities (‘disaster relief’) as well as efforts to restore or improve the pre-disaster living conditions of disaster-affected communities (‘initial recovery assistance’).<sup>3</sup> To complement the objectives of the International Dialogue on Disaster Response, the paper focuses on humanitarian assistance following natural disasters; however, it recognises that dynamics related to actual or potential armed conflict may be present in such disasters depending on the context. Issues of civil-military coordination, including initiatives to standardise and improve civil protection and military assistance during natural disasters, are discussed in Paper I. That paper also describes some of the relevant trends related to humanitarian financing, which are not covered here.

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#### **1.4 Methodology and caveats**

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As a wide-ranging survey of existing regional and international initiatives, this paper draws mainly on secondary sources, such as reports on the role of the state, documents describing key initiatives relating to the quality and coordination of assistance, and general information from organisation websites. The paper was also complemented by a handful of interviews from personnel working on some of the regional and international initiatives described herein.

It is important to note that although the HLD will consider the full spectrum of responders, this paper was not able to describe bilateral government-to-government initiatives in any detail. This means that some South-South efforts to support states in disaster-affected countries are left out, as are similar bilateral initiatives by donor governments (both OECD DAC and non-DAC donors). The paper is also not able to cover all other relevant initiatives in detail, particularly the regional initiatives, due to their large number and continuous evolution. There is likely to be some important and relevant work not covered here.

## 2 International initiatives to support states in disaster preparedness and response

### 2.1 Regulatory rules and capacity: the International Disaster Response Laws, Rules and Principles (IDRL) Programme

As noted above, few states have comprehensive domestic regulatory frameworks in place to facilitate, oversee and coordinate international assistance received following natural disasters. The lack of such frameworks constitutes a weakness in disaster preparedness. In the initial days and weeks after a disaster, government officials can become overwhelmed with the task of regulating a diverse (and growing) set of aid actors. This in turn creates bottlenecks and unnecessary red tape that can make it difficult for much-needed assistance to get through. At the same time, poor quality and coordination from some international providers means that there is still very much a need for government regulation. Legal facilities and accommodations are needed to help all assisting states and humanitarian organisations do an effective job of responding to needs.

In response to this challenge, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) researched this issue extensively and brought together Governments and other key actors to provide input on how legal frameworks can contribute to improving the delivery of disaster relief.<sup>4</sup> In November 2007, states and Red Cross and Red Crescent actors unanimously adopted the ‘Guidelines for the Domestic Facilitation and Regulation of International Disaster Relief and Recovery Assistance’ (‘the IDRL Guidelines’) at the 30th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

The IDRL Guidelines are a set of recommendations to governments on how to prepare their disaster laws and plans for the common regulatory problems in international disaster relief operations.<sup>5</sup> They recognise that the government of the affected state has the primary responsibility to address humanitarian needs created from a disaster within its borders. According to the Guidelines, international assistance providers must be held responsible for abiding by certain minimum standards, which may be ‘drawn from sources such as the Code of Conduct of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief and the Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Relief’ (see section 4 below). If states grant legal facilities to private companies providing relief, the Guidelines encourage states to hold them to the same standards as humanitarian organisations.<sup>6</sup> For government-to-government aid, the Guidelines note that there exist ‘alternative diplomatic means’ for addressing quality or coordination issues.<sup>6</sup>

The Guidelines set out specific types of legal facilities or accommodations that governments should provide to assisting states and humanitarian organisations, such as expedited visa processing and customs clearance for relief personnel, goods and equipment; facilitation of relief transport; and exemptions from taxes, duties and fees on relief activities. The Guidelines also encourage states to reduce legal barriers to disaster relief originating within or passing through their territories to the disaster-affected country.<sup>7</sup>

Important progress has been made in getting the Guidelines agreed and adopted and they are starting to be drawn upon by governments in developing their own legislative frameworks. Naturally, this is a long process.<sup>8</sup> There is a substantial amount of rhetorical commitment to the Guidelines, for example as demonstrated by resolutions adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2008, 2009 and 2010 that refer to the Guidelines. Resolution 65/133, for example, encourages ‘Member States and, where applicable, regional organisations to take further steps to strengthen operational and legal frameworks for international disaster relief, taking into account, as appropriate, the Guidelines [for the Domestic Facilitation and Regulation of International Disaster Relief and Initial Recovery Assistance], as appropriate.’<sup>9</sup>

The Guidelines are only one part of the solution to a much broader problem. Further progress will depend on initiatives that further disseminate and provide assistance on using the Guidelines. These efforts, many of which are already underway, include Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies working with their governments on domestic legislative issues in disaster management. Humanitarian partners and inter-governmental regional organisations should also find the Guidelines useful in their work. A number of other organisations have also joined the IFRC in promoting the Guidelines and legal preparedness for international disaster response, including UN OCHA, the World Customs Organisation and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. In June 2011, for example, the WCO adopted a resolution on how to enable customs administration to react more effectively in case of emergency.

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## 2.2 Disaster preparedness

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The need to reduce disaster risks through systematic efforts (disaster risk reduction, or DRR) and better prepare for those disasters that occur is being increasingly recognised by the international community. One critical component of DRR is national disaster preparedness (“preparedness”), which includes measures such as early-warning systems and community drills and exercises, as well as institutional preparedness.

In the past, DRR and preparedness have tended not to be a key concern of humanitarian actors, who are often more focused on immediate response.<sup>10</sup> Although this is changing, progress has been slow and hindered by a limited availability of donor funding. The DRR agenda recognises the primary role of governments in disaster risk management, and the need for this to be mainstreamed into development priorities. This partly explains why humanitarian actors have struggled to integrate DRR/preparedness activities and ‘mindset’ into their work.

Coordination around DRR and disaster preparedness is arguably challenged by too many initiatives and questions over the effectiveness of some of the actors. In each country, ‘international actors ‘map’ onto indigenous systems. This results in highly diverse DRR architecture at the local levels with the result that no two countries are easily comparable.”<sup>11</sup> From one point of view, states have at their disposal a wide

range of potential tools, organisations, and funding sources with which to engage in order to bolster their disaster preparedness. On the other hand, the large number of initiatives can be confounding. Despite the existence of an over-arching framework and set of commitments in the form of the Hyogo Framework for Action, there remain ‘overlapping institutional mandates . . . and . . . a lack of clarity on the overall leadership for disaster preparedness’.<sup>12</sup> The wide range of international initiatives is summarised below.

#### *Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA)*

In 2005, 168 member states endorsed the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), which urges all countries to make major efforts to reduce their disaster risk. The HFA lays out a comprehensive approach with five priorities for action. Priority five focuses on disaster preparedness, which is defined as the knowledge and capacities developed by governments, professional response and recovery organisations, communities, and individuals to effectively anticipate, respond to, and recover from the impacts of likely, imminent, or current hazard events or conditions.<sup>13</sup>

A recent ‘mid-term review’ of the HFA found that it has played a decisive role in promoting progress on DRR across international, regional, and national agendas. Progress is taking place especially from an institutional point of view, in the passing of national legislation, in setting up early warning systems, and in strengthening disaster preparedness and response. ‘National platforms’ for disaster risk reduction have been set up in many countries as designated forums for coordination at the national level. Regional level implementation of HFA has resulted in cooperation agreements and joint plans of action in all regions of the world. Implementation of HFA has been uneven across the world, however, and the review found that there is a need for the international community to support governments in the implementation of the HFA in a more coherent and integrated fashion. This includes better coordination and coherence of international efforts in support of HFA implementation, including by the United Nations.<sup>14</sup>

#### *UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR)*

The UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) was launched in 2000 at the end of the International Decade of Disaster Reduction. It established a global framework to coordinate actions to address disaster risks. UNISDR was mandated by a General Assembly resolution of 2001, mainly to ‘serve as the focal point in the United Nations system for the coordination of disaster reduction’.<sup>15</sup> Since the advent of the HFA in 2005, the focus of the ISDR has shifted towards becoming a broker at global and regional levels to cater for and monitor the implementation of HFA among all stakeholders. In 2007 a multi-stakeholder platform called the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction was created. This involves Governments, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, regional organisations, and civil society organisations. The Global Platform has met in 2007, 2009 and May 2011 and is seen as one of ISDR’s successes in terms of advocacy and awareness

raising.<sup>16</sup> Its ‘Chair’s Summary’ has become key guidance for disaster risk reduction stakeholders.<sup>17</sup>

While UNISDR and the GFDRR (described below) are theoretically two actors in one coherent system, in practice they sometimes have been seen as a rival rather than a partner. A recent review by UK DfID of multilateral organisations concluded that GFDRR provided ‘good value for money’ whereas ISDR provided ‘poor value for money’. It was found that ISDR ‘gives little strategic guidance to Disaster Risk Reduction partners and has no results based framework.’ It also suggested that GFDRR should ‘consult civil society more and work with UNISDR system . . . for better coordination at country level’.<sup>18</sup> These findings have been contested by UNISDR, however, which has argued that the review assessed operational effectiveness and that non-operational entities were disadvantaged in the methodology used in the assessment, among other critiques.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR)*

A key mechanism for supporting the work of the ISDR and the implementation of the Hyogo Framework is the World Bank’s Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR). Launched in 2006, on behalf of participating donors and other partnering stakeholders, the GFDRR is ‘a partnership of the ISDR system to support the implementation of the Hyogo Framework.’ It provides technical and financial assistance to low- and middle-income countries to mainstream disaster reduction in their development strategies. Activities funded by the GFDRR are implemented by government as well as non-governmental actors at the national level.

#### *United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)*

The UNDP is also very involved in Disaster Risk Reduction, including preparedness. In 1998, the UN General Assembly transferred to UNDP the responsibilities of the Emergency Relief Coordinator for ‘operational activities for natural disaster mitigation, prevention and preparedness’.<sup>20</sup> The DRR work of UNDP focuses solely on natural disasters, not conflict. It works directly with governments at the country level on institutional reform, developing and establishing disaster management laws, agreeing on mandates between institutions/ministries, developing civil protection mechanisms, and DRR planning, among other tasks.<sup>21</sup> UNDP has provided capacity building support in disaster reduction to over 48 individual countries as well as regional mechanisms.<sup>22</sup> UNDP works to achieve its goals mainly through its Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR), which operates in cooperation with regional and country offices.<sup>23</sup>

#### *OCHA, UNDAC preparedness missions and CADRI*

The United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC), managed by UN OCHA, is a core part of the international emergency response system for sudden-onset emergencies (see section 2.3 below). In addition, UNDAC teams have also recently begun to undertake disaster response preparedness missions. These

missions, which take place upon specific request from a Government, evaluate the national disaster preparedness and response capacity and plans. Areas that are addressed include security, logistics, medical, transportation, and communications, and specifically how tasks will be divided among government, the military and the UN. To date, the UNDAC team has carried out 16 such missions worldwide.<sup>24</sup>

More broadly, OCHA's mandate includes 'supporting and strengthening national capacity for emergency response'.<sup>25</sup> This includes the preparedness of OCHA and the international humanitarian community to respond, as well as the preparedness of national and regional authorities to respond, in collaboration with UNDP and UNISDR.<sup>26</sup> OCHA tends to be particularly engaged in preparedness activities in countries where it already has a field presence, but it also launches missions to other low-capacity, high-risk countries from its regional offices around the world.<sup>27</sup> Efforts are also being made to better integrate disaster management into the development frameworks of governments and the UN through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) process, for example.<sup>28</sup> UN Country Teams and Resident Coordinators are being more strictly appraised, bringing greater accountability for the quality of preparedness. OCHA has been using the Global Focus Model to ensure that priority countries have strong contingency plans in place that are regularly updated.<sup>29</sup>

Another area of operational coordination is the Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative (CADRI) project, a partnership between UNISDR, OCHA, and UNDP. It was created in 2007 and works on all five priorities of the HFA. CADRI provides capacity enhancement services to both the UN system at the country level as well as to governments. As of 2009, however, funding levels and the extent of institutional engagement in the project were limited.<sup>30</sup>

#### *Other humanitarian agencies*

Lastly, within the humanitarian community, many actors are involved in disaster preparedness, in addition to disaster response. Besides UN OCHA, a range of UN agencies, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and national Red Cross / Red Crescent societies, the European Commission and other donor governments, as well as a large group of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and their partners work in the area of national disaster preparedness.<sup>31</sup> UK DfID funded five major NGOs to carry out DRR projects from 2005-2010, for example: ActionAid, Christian Aid, Practical Action, Plan and Tearfund.<sup>32</sup> The European Commission's DIPECHO programme has invested more than 180 million Euros in disaster preparedness since 1996. Many of these projects are implemented by a partner that works with a government and through a 'community-based approach'; DIPECHO does not fund governments directly.<sup>33</sup> These actors vary considerably in how and to what degree they work with and through national governments on disaster preparedness.<sup>34</sup> While many efforts are undertaken in close collaboration with national platforms or governments, overall coordination on DRR at the country level tends to be ad hoc and often limited.<sup>35</sup>

### *The Inter-Agency Standing Committee on Humanitarian Response (IASC)*

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee on Humanitarian Response (IASC) is one of the key mechanisms for the inter-agency coordination, policy development and decision-making on international humanitarian assistance. It includes UN and non-UN humanitarian partners, and was established in 1992 in response to United Nations General Assembly Resolution 46/182 on the strengthening of humanitarian assistance. General Assembly Resolution 48/57 affirmed its role as the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance.<sup>36</sup>

Until recently, the IASC's efforts on disaster preparedness mainly focused on the preparedness of the international system, rather than national level actors and systems. Its Sub-Working Group (SWG) on Preparedness was established in 2001 with the aim of 'strengthening and promoting inter-agency preparedness, contingency planning and early warning processes across the IASC community of humanitarian actors'.<sup>37</sup>

The IASC, via a Sub-Working Group on Financing, is also currently looking at options for strengthening of funding for preparedness activities.<sup>38</sup> This will include developing stronger links with governments, especially in five pilot countries. Efforts will focus on investing more in contingency planning as a way of developing better links with national actors. If successful, these efforts will be replicated in countries with a high level of disaster risk and a low level of response capacity.<sup>39</sup>

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### **2.3 Immediate disaster response**

There is a huge range of international actors and initiatives related to disaster response. This section focuses on those mechanisms that have been developed to respond in the earliest days of a sudden onset disaster, and how they support the host government.

### *United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC)*

Created in 1993, the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) is part of the international emergency response system for sudden-onset emergencies.<sup>40</sup> OCHA mobilises UNDAC teams mostly in the event of a natural disaster, when a disaster-affected country requests international assistance and requires additional international coordination resources. UNDAC teams can deploy in short notice anywhere in the world and are provided free of charge to the disaster-affected country. They are deployed upon the request of the affected Government and/or the United Nations Resident or Humanitarian Coordinator.

When there are major relief operations to be coordinated, the UNDAC team will establish an On-site Operations Coordination Centre (OSOCC). This idea originated with search and rescue operations, for which it is particularly useful, but has since been used in other types of disasters such as floods, hurricanes and tsunamis.<sup>41</sup> An OSOCC is set up to help local authorities in a disaster-affected country to coordinate international relief. It acts as a link between international

responders and the Government of the affected country, and provides a platform for cooperation, coordination and information management among international humanitarian agencies.<sup>42</sup>

As of December 2010, UNDAC had conducted 207 emergency missions in over 90 countries. OCHA has just commissioned a review of the UNDAC system, which will be discussed at the UNDAC Advisory Board in February 2012. This will be the first evaluation of the UNDAC system since 2001, except for a smaller evaluation of UNDAC preparedness missions.

#### *The International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG)*

One important component of response to certain types of disasters, in particular earthquakes, is search and rescue. In 1991, following the 1988 Armenia earthquake, the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) was established to improve the quality and coordination of urban search and rescue (USAR) efforts. INSARAG activities are guided by United Nations General Assembly resolution 57/150 of 16 December 2002 on ‘Strengthening the Effectiveness and Coordination of International Urban Search and Rescue Assistance’. The INSARAG Hyogo Declaration adopted at the first INSARAG Global Meeting in 2010 in Kobe, Japan is also a key guiding document.<sup>43</sup> INSARAG aims to make search and rescue activities more effective, and hence save more lives, by coordinating them on site and developing procedures, guidelines and best practices for search and rescue teams. The INSARAG has established a voluntary, independent peer review process for international USAR teams called the ‘INSARAG External Classification’ (IEC) (see section 4.3 below).

Both INSARAG and UNDAC have strong linkages with governments, including strong governance from Member States. A group of Natural Disaster Management Agencies and Ministries of Foreign Affairs meet regularly to discuss how UNDAC should work, for example. An evaluation of SAR is conducted after each emergency and this includes meeting with the affected state government. The flip side is that both mechanisms have been less linked up to rest of international humanitarian system. The recent evaluation of the cluster approach pointed to a lack of clarity between the roles of the ‘early’ coordination mechanisms, such as UNDAC field teams, INSARAG and OSOCCs, and the cluster approach. They note: ‘an issue that also emerged, but was not fully explored by this evaluation, is the unclear distribution of roles and lack of coordination between the cluster system and international mechanisms for immediate crisis response (typically in the first two weeks after sudden-onset disasters). . . .’<sup>44</sup>

#### *International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)*

In a given country, the National Red Cross or Red Crescent National Society, acting as an auxiliary to government action, will normally be one of the first and principal responders to a sudden-onset natural disaster. When additional outside support is needed, the IFRC has a variety of mechanisms or tools at to support them. These

include Regional Disaster Response Teams (RDRT) or Regional Intervention Teams (RIT), Emergency Response Units (ERU) and Field Assessment Coordination Teams (FACT).

The regional teams (RDRTs and RITs) aim to promote building of regional capacities in disaster management. They are composed of National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society volunteers or staff, usually members of their own national response teams, trained to work as a team and bring assistance to National Societies in neighbouring countries. An ERU is a team of trained technical specialists, ready to be deployed at short notice, which uses pre-packed sets of standardised equipment. ERUs are designed to be self-sufficient for one month and can operate for up to four months. If the need for assistance continues beyond a four-month period, the service can be managed by the IFRC's ongoing operation, the host National Society, the local government or other organisation/s. FACT are made up of experienced Red Cross Red Crescent disaster managers who support National Societies and IFRC field offices to respond effectively to disasters. FACT is on standby and can be deployed anywhere in the world within 12–24 hours, for a period of 2 to 4 weeks.<sup>45</sup>

#### *Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)*

Many different NGOs, both international and national, may respond to a given natural disaster in the earliest days. Some will already be present in the country, while others may mobilise new teams expressly for the disaster. Many of the largest international NGOs have highly developed rapid response mechanisms, with specialists on hand who have expertise in key areas necessary to assess critical needs and mount a response to sudden emergencies. The way that NGO rapid response teams interact with government officials is highly variable, with some building on decades of relationship-building, others taking care to build on local capacity and government efforts, and still others ignoring or bypassing government altogether.

### 3 Regional initiatives to support states in disaster preparedness and response

#### 3.1 The role of regional organisations generally

Over the past ten to fifteen years, regional organisations have increased their role in supporting states on disaster preparedness and response. In many ways, regional organisations are better placed to support the state. Because they are often themselves comprised of member states and are (usually) not operational, they can more easily play a supportive role, compared with global organisations, which are more likely to be involved in delivering relief to populations. The main focus of regional organisations is often on ways that states can help one another, either directly or through the secretariat or governing body of the organisation.

There is justifiably a lot of enthusiasm about the growing, and potentially significant, role of regional organisations in natural disasters—mainly as an effective ‘bridge’ between the international and national systems. A regional entity, working from cultural and linguistic commonalities, can provide a forum for building trust and familiarity that is not possible on a global scale. For these reasons they can often be more effective in establishing common policies and resolving issues of contention.

On the other hand, it is important to distinguish between different types of regional organisations. Some are essentially political bodies while others are becoming more operational. Some are genuinely effective, while others lack real buy-in from their member states. Even those with greater buy-in from states are often internally focused or focused largely on state-state cooperation. With a few exceptions, most regional organisations are still operating in ‘silos’, carrying out their activities in isolation from other regional organisations and the broader international system.

By and large, the rhetoric of many regional organisations is ahead of the reality. Actors in many regions have called attention to the importance of strengthening national capacities for disaster response, and to developing relationships between international and national disaster-management officials, but there remain significant gaps between ‘what is established in principle and what happens in practice.<sup>246</sup> As is evident from the below, many regional bodies’ strategies and plans for improving response and preparedness are still at the planning stages, and there is also often no way of measuring the uptake of plans and strategies.

As regional organisations seek to play a larger role in natural disaster response and preparedness, there will increasingly be questions. How does the role of regional organisations in helping states prepare for and respond to disasters compare with that of international-level (global) bodies? Is there a useful role for regional bodies, or would it be more efficient and effective to focus on global-level cooperation? Many regional organisations seek to establish a mechanism for coordinating offers of assistance, for example; but how should such a mechanism relate to OCHA, which is mandated to play this role? In addition, how should different types of regional organisations (for example, at the sub-regional and regional level, with overlapping state membership), interact with each other? In many cases there is likely to be overlap, duplication and a lack of clarity about roles. Not enough is known about how regional organisations relate to each other and to the international

system. At the same time, their role is undoubtedly increasing, and international actors can choose to ignore them at their peril.

The sections below some of the key regional initiatives related to natural disaster response, including some of an ad hoc nature, not associated with any established organisation. It does not cover some ad hoc regional initiatives with a focus on a particular country or disaster (such as the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands). It also does not describe the wide range of specialised regional or sub-regional bodies focused on climate change, meteorology and hydrology, for example. Also not described here are various regional task forces and coordinating mechanisms established by OCHA and/or through the IASC. These bodies often provide an important venue for OCHA, the main UN agencies, large international NGOs as well as regional or sub-regional organisations and sometimes donors to work together.

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### **3.2 The Americas**

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There are many regional organisations in Latin America and the Caribbean focused on a variety of issues such as governance, development, health, education and poverty alleviation. Many of these entities have also long supported comprehensive disaster management policies and tools.<sup>47</sup> One key initiative, the EIHP (see below), is not associated with a specific regional body.

#### *Regional Meeting on Enhancing International Humanitarian Partnerships in Latin America and the Caribbean (EIHP)*

Starting in 2008 upon the initiative of Mexico, member states of Latin America and the Caribbean have held four meetings on ‘Enhancing International Humanitarian Partnerships’. As it has grown, the initiative has increasingly involved key international organisations, in particular UN OCHA and IFRC. It is seen as a useful initiative because it has been driven by member states themselves, and because it takes a comprehensive approach. The basic idea is to have a better understanding of what systems are in place, including at individual state, sub-regional and regional levels. Representatives are mainly from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs. A key initiative of the EIHP has been the creation of a legal compendium, based on the IDRL Guidelines, which is based on countries providing information about the legal norms, laws and procedures they have in place for international assistance. This allows them to help identify their gaps. In the declaration following the 2011 meeting, all countries agreed to name a focal point to complete the compendium.

#### *Organization of American States (OAS)*

The Organization of American States (OAS) is the world’s oldest regional organisation, officially established in 1948 but dating back to 1889.<sup>48</sup> It brings together all 35 independent states of the Americas and constitutes the main political, juridical, and social governmental forum in the Hemisphere.<sup>49</sup> The mandate

of OAS in terms of disaster management mainly concerns preparedness. Its role in response has been more limited. The political bodies of the OAS have addressed the issue, and these efforts have been backed up by the ongoing work of the technical and cooperation bodies. However, the achievements of the OAS in the area of disaster preparedness and response have so far been quite limited.

Member states of the OAS adopted the Inter-American Convention to Facilitate Disaster Assistance in 1991. As of 2007, only three states had ratified the Convention.<sup>50</sup> Recently, two more states have ratified it and it is now theoretically in implementation in five countries: Colombia, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Panama and Peru.<sup>51</sup> It should apply whenever there is a request for assistance from one country to another, and addresses issues such as transit, personnel, security, costs, claims, indemnity, and the role of government and NGOs in disaster assistance. All of these are addressed at a very general level, however, with considerable room for interpretation by member states.

Since 1999, the Inter-American Committee has focused on disaster preparedness and DRR. The Committee was established by the OAS General Assembly and includes key development institutes like the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Its purpose is to be the principal forum for discussing natural disasters. There is some sense that these issues are now being increasingly discussed, because of the growing intensity and frequency of disasters. The Committee presented a draft resolution to the General Assembly in June 2011 (subsequently adopted) that included their recommendations on moving forward, including some recommendations on how to strengthen the implementation of provisions in the Convention. In this process, the IDRL Guidelines have been very useful, although they are more detailed than has been discussed at the level of the Convention.

The OAS is also home to an Inter-American fund for disaster response, made up of voluntary contributions by member states. This is a very small fund, however, and is really more of an expression of solidarity in difficult times than a viable financing mechanism.

#### *CEPREDENAC, CDEMA and CAPRADE*

To contribute to a programme of research on the role of the state, the Humanitarian Policy Group commissioned a background paper on natural disaster coordination in Latin America and the Caribbean. This paper, by Patricia Weiss Fagen, notes that:

There are three inter-governmental regional organisations dedicated to coordinating disaster-related activities, disseminating information and bringing national decision-makers together to discuss regional initiatives. The largest, oldest and most active is the Central American entity, the Coordination Center for Natural Disaster Prevention, CEPREDENAC, founded in 1988, the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Committee, CDERA, established in 1991 [now the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency], and the Andean Committee for Disaster Prevention and

Assistance, created in 2002. Each is an inter-governmental network . . . All three state their primary mission to be the strengthening of disaster prevention and preparedness through regional planning, information, training and coordination. Their statutes have been ratified by their member states, and their policies are determined by high-level representation from member states. The three secretariats, which are small, sponsor events, workshops and regional meetings, disseminate guidelines and information, and work with donors for regional initiatives. Member governments in the three entities participate and make use of information, training and so on, but contribute barely enough funding to support the salaries of a small secretariat. The actual activities of the three regional secretariats, therefore, depend largely on what can be funded from external sources.<sup>52</sup>

CEPREDENAC, for example, has had success in building a network of scientist-experts and producing studies, but there has been a lack of commitment by national disaster management agencies to take up these findings.<sup>53</sup> There is evidence of increasing implementation of 2001 mechanism, mainly through more Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs) and Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Centers (CCAHs). This is activated when the President of a country declares a national emergency. The EOC should be linked directly to a unit within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which should be in charge of ambassadorial management. Together they decide what assistance is needed. Within the EOC there is meant to be a Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Center (CCAH), which is the focal point for all international response actors and donors during a disaster and is in charge of the general management of assistance.<sup>54</sup> However, funding for CEPREDENAC has been limited, and dependent on outside sources and voluntary annual fees.<sup>55</sup>

#### *The Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR)*

The Southern Common Market, known as MERCOSUR, is an economic and political agreement among Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, founded in 1991. While its main goals are economic, MERCOSUR member states have recently begun a ‘Specialised Meeting on Disaster Risk Reduction, Civil Defense, Civil Protection and Humanitarian Assistance’ known as REHU. The meeting was first convened by the Presidents and Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the MERCOSUR countries in July 2009. Holding at least two meetings since then, the MERCOSUR countries have expressed their intention to create mechanisms of coordination and mutual assistance, but to date no concrete arrangements have been made.

#### *Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)*

The Pan American Health Organization is the regional organisation of the WHO, with a more than 100-year history. In the paper cited above, Patricia Weiss Fagen notes that PAHO ‘warrants special treatment among the agencies concerned with disaster management because of its success in bringing disaster preparedness into health agendas.<sup>56</sup> Its efforts have resulted in the establishment of disaster management offices in the health ministries of more than three-quarters of

Latin American and Caribbean countries.<sup>57</sup> In particular, PAHO has encouraged the establishment of hospitals and health facilities that are ‘disaster-safe’ and helped to introduce a system for tracking international disaster assistance (called SUMA), which is now widely used in disaster-affected countries.<sup>58</sup> PAHO/WHO, working with other agencies, has also led an initiative to improve the quality and appropriateness of humanitarian donations. In 2009, it published a set of guidelines, including recommendations to donors and the media, on how to reduce wasteful and unnecessary aid donations following a disaster.<sup>59</sup>

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### 3.3 Asia-Pacific

Asia-Pacific is the world’s most natural disaster-prone region. Between 2000 and 2008, at least 40 percent of registered disaster events occurred in the region.<sup>60</sup> Given the substantial economic growth experienced in the region in the past few decades, increasingly more countries have substantial resources of their own to enable them to respond to disasters.<sup>61</sup> Both disaster preparedness and national response capacity have been significantly strengthened. As one illustration, of the 37 countries covered by the OCHA regional office 36 have established national disaster-management authorities, mandated to build capacity and coordinate domestic response activities.<sup>62</sup>

There is no region-wide instrument relating to disaster responses in the Asia-Pacific. However, there is a growing cooperation, and even coordination, role for regional bodies. The role of the most active of these regional bodies, ASEAN, as well as a few other key bodies, are described in some detail below.

#### *Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)*

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is an organisation founded in 1967 that now comprises ten member states. At the end of 2008, a new ASEAN Charter entered into force, giving it a new legal framework and a number of new organs. Its fundamental principles include a strong respect for the independence of each member state, settlement of differences in a peaceful manner, and a vision of a one-community strategic direction for cooperation.<sup>63</sup>

In July 2005, ASEAN adopted an Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER). This is a legally binding framework, which aims to strengthen regional collaboration among the ten ASEAN member states. In December 2009, it was ratified by all ten ASEAN states and came into force. It allows for the ten countries to work together, but also underlies importance of the national government to work together to strengthen its own capacities, including legal frameworks; as a mechanism, AADMER looks both ‘inwards’ and ‘outwards’, in other words. ASEAN has also appointed a Humanitarian Assistance Coordinator, currently Dr Surin Pitsuwan, ASEAN’s Secretary-General. In 2010, it launched an ASEAN partnership group (APG), which aims to be a bridge between government institutions and civil society in disaster management.

AADMER covers not only disaster preparation and response, but also prevention, mitigation and recovery. The agreement helps facilitate countries in calling for international cooperation, with and among countries, as well as with international organisations of the UN. ASEAN is also setting up the ASEAN Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) through which ASEAN can provide assistance to a country to help them deal with international assistance, if they request this.<sup>64</sup> A Committee has come up with operational guidelines to implement provisions under AADMER. One of these guidelines is the Regional Standby Arrangement and Standard Operating Procedure (SASOP), which cover how countries inform other ASEAN countries about disasters and the role of Center in facilitating info management, for example. Although states can do request assistance bilaterally, in the spirit of cooperation, they try to do it through ASEAN. AADMER gives ASEAN states the obligation to enhance their capacities internally in how they deal with the other ten countries, but the agreement does not specify exactly how this must happen. Currently only Indonesia has written regulations on the role of ASEAN parties, international organisations and non-governmental organisations, including the procedures for these organisations to get approval to operate and how the international assistance will be managed.

Following Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in 2008, ASEAN was asked to step in and serve as a bridge between the affected country and the international humanitarian community. Despite the scale of the disaster, the Myanmar government was reluctant to call for international assistance. In the end, a Tripartite Core Group (TCG) comprising ASEAN, the UN and the Myanmar government provided ‘international assistance with a regional character’, and allowed a less threatening way for the Myanmar leadership to accept an international relief operation.<sup>65</sup> ASEAN provided an enabling environment and essentially established a field coordination presence in Myanmar shortly after the disaster. The ASEAN-led coordinating mechanism also helped to make sure assistance was monitored and used effectively, based on a credible needs assessment. ASEAN also played a role in mobilising funds.

There is broad consensus that the role played by ASEAN in the Cyclone Nargis response was critical. An ASEAN report summarises: ‘Amidst the chaos and confusion ASEAN took the lead in breaking down the communication and trust barriers that were preventing the flow of aid and international relief workers into the country. The Secretary-General of ASEAN took it upon himself to personally persuade Government leaders to permit the entry of relief workers into the country to assist Cyclone survivors in the spirit of [AADMER].’<sup>66</sup> The Inter-Agency Real Time Evaluation of the Response to Cyclone Nargis concludes that ‘if not for the effective intervention of ASEAN with UN support, the role of the international community would have been much smaller. There was broad agreement among senior international staff interviewed that the engagement of ASEAN with the Government had been critical to the easing of restrictions and, without their involvement, even UN engagement at the top level would have been insufficient.’<sup>67</sup>

### *Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)*

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is a forum with 21 countries (known as ‘member economies’), from Asia as well as North America and Latin America, that seeks to promote free trade and economic cooperation throughout the Asia-Pacific region. APEC is mainly concerned with economic issues, including raising living standards throughout the region, as well as fostering a sense of ‘Asian regionalism’.<sup>68</sup> APEC seeks to address some issues, which although not strictly economic, can have serious economic implications, including better preparing the region for emergencies.<sup>69</sup>

APEC’s Emergency Preparedness Working Group (EPWG) was first established in 2005. It has recently developed an ambitious strategy for 2009-2015, with three overarching objectives:

1. To provide APEC economies with solid information on the economic and social costs of disasters and on the human and economic costs of failing to take action;
2. To analyse gaps in regional disaster risk reduction approaches with a view to developing targeted capacity-building initiatives; and
3. To identify a suite of practical mechanisms, instruments and communication products for implementation at a community level, including measures that enhance business and community resilience.<sup>70</sup>

The strategy also takes note of the IDRL guidelines in an appendix.

The main activities of APEC’s EPWG in 2008 to 2010 consisted of study courses, workshops and dialogue between APEC countries and international and regional partners on strengthening cooperation, and on learning more generally from each other’s experiences. The APEC ‘Emergency Management CEO’s Forum has been held every year since 2007. This forum brings together the heads of emergency management agencies in the region to help APEC member economies— both individually and collectively— better prepare for and respond to disasters. The forums provide participants with the opportunity to share experiences, lessons learnt, tools and the latest thinking related to disaster preparedness, thereby helping to enhance regional cooperation and preparedness efforts.<sup>71</sup>

### *South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)*

The SAARC is an organisation of South Asian nations, founded in 1985, which includes eight member countries. Following the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004, SAARC developed a comprehensive framework on disaster management in South Asia, which is aligned with the Hyogo Framework for Action.<sup>72</sup> The Framework was approved by the SAARC Council of Ministers in July 2006 and by the Fourteenth SAARC Summit in April 2007. In 2006, the SAARC Disaster Management Centre (SDMC) was set up in New Delhi, India, to provide policy advice and capacity building services for more effective disaster risk reduction and management in South Asia. The Centre conducts studies and research, organises workshops and

training programmes, publishes its reports and documents and provides various policy advisory services to the Member Countries.<sup>73</sup>

At the 15th SAARC Summit in 2008, it was declared that a Natural Disaster Rapid Response Mechanism should be created under the support of the Disaster Management Centre to adopt a coordinated and planned approach to meet disaster emergencies.<sup>74</sup> Subsequent expert-level meetings have formulated a draft agreement which, according to the Secretary-General of SAARC Fathimath Dhiyana Saeed, is ‘based on the principle of respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of all member states . . . the mechanism will only be triggered . . . if a request for assistance is made by a member state’.<sup>75</sup> The draft agreement covers issues such as exemptions and facilities for provision of assistance, transit of personnel, equipment, facilities and materials.<sup>76</sup> If the draft is finalised it will be signed at the 17th SAARC Summit to be held in the Maldives in November 2011.<sup>77</sup>

#### *Other regional bodies in the Asia-Pacific region*

Several other regional bodies in the Asia-Pacific region are active in the area of disaster management. These include the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), a political grouping of sixteen states of the Pacific Ocean, and the Pacific Islands Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC), which recently became a new division within the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). For international humanitarian actors, in particular those with a coordination function such as UN OCHA and the IFRC, these are all potential interlocutors for regional disaster management coordination.<sup>78</sup> Other regional bodies include the recently created Australia-Indonesia Disaster Reduction Facility, the Asian Disaster Prevention Centre (ADPC), and the ISDR Asian Partnership Platform.<sup>79</sup> From the perspective of national governments, these regional bodies (where relevant) offer potential resources, including lesson learning and sharing of good practice between national disaster-management agencies.

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### **3.4 Africa**

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In Africa, several sub-regional organisations have addressed disaster response issues through individual provisions in constitutive agreements, like the Agreement Establishing the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) of 1995; individual provisions of broader agreements, like the Southern African Development Community’s (SADC) Protocol on Health of 1999; and policies and strategies, such as the Economic Community of West African States’ (ECOWAS) Mechanism for Disaster Reduction of 2006.<sup>80</sup> In addition, the African Union has recently begun to formulate an overall strategy on DRR for the region.

#### *Southern African Development Community (SADC)*

SADC was founded in 1980 and now comprises fifteen member states. Working closely with UN OCHA, UNISDR and GFDRR, the recently established SADC DRR unit seeks to coordinate regional preparedness and

response programmes for trans-boundary hazards and disasters.<sup>81</sup> SADC has played an important role in strengthening assessments through support to national-level vulnerability-assessment committees.<sup>82</sup> Annual workshops are also held with representatives from SADC member states, UN agencies, international partners, non-governmental organisations, donors and civil society, to deliberate on the implications of the seasonal rainfall forecast, and agree on the necessary contingency and preparedness measures, typically related to floods and droughts. The workshops also address preparedness for health emergencies. Securing funding to SADC for its work in this area has been a challenge, preventing many activities from getting off the ground. A recent report notes that ‘Many activities are underway to secure support and funding from various partners to assist the SADC DRRU to meet its minimum obligations in the region.’<sup>83</sup>

#### *The Economic Commission of West African States (ECOWAS)*

ECOWAS is a regional group of sixteen countries, founded in 1975. Its mission is to promote economic integration in all fields of activity, and it comprises not only the ECOWAS Commission but also a Parliament, Community Court of Justice and the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development. In January 2007, heads of government adopted the ECOWAS Policy for Disaster Risk Reduction. A subsequent implementation for the policy has been validated. ECOWAS has also developed a Guideline for establishing and strengthening National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, based on UNISDR Guidelines. However, many countries have yet to develop national policies, legislation or plans for integrating DRR. There is no West African regional mechanism for sharing information or carrying out risk assessments.

Within the Directorate of Humanitarian and Social Affairs of the ECOWAS Commission, there has been established a Disaster Risk Reduction Division (DRR) and there are plans to create an ECOWAS Emergency Response Team (EERT) Unit. The aim of the EERT is mainly to act as civilian tool to complement peace support operations in West Africa, as well as to provide first line emergency response. The members of the EERT would be located in situ, in Member States, and would be drawn from national NGOs and staff of relevant government ministries.

#### *The African Union and the African Regional Strategy for DRR*

The African Union (AU) has recently begun to take a more active role in disaster risk reduction.<sup>84</sup> The AU’s approach is seen as useful in offering a strategic approach that can bring together disparate efforts and promote a high level of quality at the national level.<sup>85</sup> In January 2011, the Executive Council of the AU endorsed the Extended Programme of Action (PoA) (2006-2015), which is aimed in good part at further integrating DRR into the climate change adaptation agenda. The African Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction has been reconstituted, and will provide the institutional architecture for technical support and strengthening coordination, guidance and monitoring of the implementation of the PoA. The AU and UNISDR

have also played a leading role in initiating a World Disaster Campaign on ‘Making Cities Resilient: My City is getting ready’ in Africa’. Sixteen cities have signed into the City Campaign. A feasibility study has been commissioned to create an AU-led, African owned Pan-African Disaster Risk Pool. Perhaps most significantly, the African Union member states have undertaken to increase their investments in disaster risk reduction through the allocation of a certain percentage of their national budgets and other revenue dedicated to disaster risk reduction.<sup>86</sup>

In mid-2011, the African Union began drafting its Humanitarian Policy Framework, which provides for a set of principles for humanitarian action, and will form the basis for an AU Humanitarian Policy in the future. It calls for the establishment of an effective coordination mechanism for humanitarian operations on the African continent, and situates the African Union Commission to provide technical and material support to its member states in humanitarian crises. With regard to disasters, the Framework advocates for appropriate training in emergency response on the national level, establishment of an early warning and monitoring system and the establishment of a database of experts in different areas of disaster management. The IFRC, working from the perspective of the IDRL Guidelines, has inputted into the drafting of the Framework.<sup>87</sup>

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### 3.5 Europe

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Europe has adopted a large number of regional and sub-regional instruments on disaster response. These include, notably, the European Community Civil Protection Mechanism, which is designed to facilitate civil protection assistance both inside and outside the borders of the European Union (EU). Civil protection assistance ‘is delivered during the immediate phase of a disaster and in case of third countries usually works parallel with or hands over to humanitarian aid’.<sup>88</sup> This includes natural disasters as well as biological, chemical, environmental, radiological and technological disasters; and combating the effects of terrorist attacks.<sup>89</sup> A ‘legislative framework for European civil protection’ has enabled the Commission to establish a framework for effective and rapid co-operation between national civil protection services when mutual assistance is needed.<sup>90</sup> A Monitoring and Information Center (MIC) is set up to coordinate assistance (including funds, technical assistance, and in-kind donations) between states if requested and activated. Regular meetings are held following disasters to discuss lessons learned; regular exchanges also take place between directors and officers at a technical level, from different countries. The civil protection mechanism has become a key framework through which European countries manage disaster responses.

Governments of Europe have also developed a number of instruments outside the EU context, such as the Council of Europe’s ‘EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement’ of 1987, the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents of 1992, the Agreement among the Governments of the Participating States of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) on Collaboration in Emergency Assistance and Emergency Response to Natural and Man-Made Disasters of 1998, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation’s (NATO)

## Memorandum of Understanding on the Facilitation of Vital Civil Cross Border Transport of 2006.<sup>91</sup>

On DRR and preparedness, there are several regional initiatives, including Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative for South Eastern Europe, the Central European Disaster Prevention Forum, the Regional Cooperation Council for South Eastern Europe, the European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction (EFDRR) and A European Network of National Platforms.<sup>92</sup> The European Network of National Platforms works to strengthen early warning systems, support the role of prevention in coping strategies, build links between prevention and relief, and give feedback to influence national policies. At the national level, 36 countries have HFA focal points and 18 national platforms have been established. Although there has been significant progress towards the HFA goals, a core challenge relates to the need for the political will to advance disaster risk reduction to the top of the policy agenda. Although there is increasingly legislation at the national level, such mandates are not always accompanied with adequate funding for local governments to carry them out.<sup>93</sup>

At the beginning of 2010, the EC began work to draft new 'Host Nation Support' guidelines. Belgium had identified Host Nation Support as one of the priorities in the field of civil protection during its Presidency (second half of 2010). The objective is to improve countries' capability to receive and organise foreign assistance on the national territory in the event of a disaster that overwhelms national response capacities. Work continues on drafting the guidelines, with a particular focus on legal, financial and administrative requirements (e.g. recognition of professional qualifications, authorisation to perform medical acts, existence of national financial channels to calculate, invoice or waive possible needs for reimbursement of offered assistance, regulations at border crossing, etc.), issues of liability, as well as logistical difficulties related to transportation or storage of in-kind assistance.

As one component of this work, the Commission funded a project on 'Analysis of Law in the EU pertaining to Cross-Border Disaster Relief'. This looks at the European regulatory frameworks at the regional and national levels and problem areas in cross- border operations. The project was completed in 2009-2010 with the IFRC in cooperation with six national Red Cross organisations.

Lastly, one notable mechanism in Europe is the International Humanitarian Partnership (IHP). The IHP is an informal partnership between eight governmental organisations in Europe. It has the capacity to support (primarily) the United Nations but also the European Union and other international organisations like the IFRC. It mainly provides operational support through standardised modules like large base camps housing up to 300 international aid workers, as well as other technical and logistical services. The IHP has carried out at least a dozen missions since 1995.<sup>94</sup> It provides support only to international organisations, not governments of the affected country.

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### **3.6 The Middle East, North Africa**

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#### *The League of Arab States (LAS)*

Several regional organisations take an active role on humanitarian assistance. The League of Arab States (LAS) was formed in 1945 and now has 22 members of across North Africa and the Middle East. The League has long taken a role in humanitarian assistance efforts in the region, and its involvement in the international system has recently increased. As member states of the Arab League have become larger donors to multilateral assistance efforts, including through UN agencies, the League has begun supporting UN appeals and advocating for improved coordination among its member states.<sup>95</sup> In Darfur, the League has slowly increased its activities, in particular following the expulsion of 13 international (Western) NGOs in March 2009. In April 2009, the League appointed a special coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs in Darfur to coordinate Arab humanitarian assistance to the region.<sup>96</sup>

#### *The Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC)*

The Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) has a membership of 57 states across four continents, established in 1969. In 2008, the OIC established a department for humanitarian activities known as the Islamic Conference Humanitarian Affairs Department (ICHAD). The department has been involved in mobilising resources for and implementing responses to specific disasters,<sup>97</sup> as well as working to bring together Muslim NGOs. In March 2011, for example, LAS and OIC organised a collaborative aid convoy to east Libya, with 20 different humanitarian agencies from Egypt, Libya and the UK.<sup>98</sup> OCHA and the OIC signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2009.<sup>99</sup>

#### *The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)*

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is a political and economic alliance of six Middle Eastern countries, established in 1981. GCC member states, in particular Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, have become increasingly prominent humanitarian donors. Saudi Arabia, for example, has become by far the largest non-Western humanitarian donor, contributing \$1.3 billion in humanitarian aid over the past five years.<sup>100</sup> OCHA maintains is seeking to enhance its cooperation with regional inter-governmental organisations such as the GCC, through its liaison office in Dubai and its main regional office now located in Cairo.<sup>101</sup> It views these organisations as important fora for sensitising policy makers in the region, and for garnering political support for disaster preparedness and respect for humanitarian principles.<sup>102</sup>

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### **3.7 Civil-military initiatives at the regional level**

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Most governments have established civilian leadership for general disaster management and to lead recovery efforts. When civilian capabilities have proven

insufficient, or in cases where the military is seen as particularly suited to respond, governments in many regions have also relied on their own militaries (or on those of allied countries), to respond to emergencies, including natural disasters. Perspectives vary between countries as to whether Military and Civil Defence Assets (MCDA) should be used in exceptional cases only, or as a matter of course. The Oslo Guidelines of 1994 stipulate that MCDA should be used as a ‘last resort’, as a tool complementing existing relief mechanisms and, in the case of foreign military and civil defence assets, ‘only where there is no comparable civilian alternative and only the use of military or civil defence assets can meet a critical humanitarian need’.<sup>103</sup> Some countries in the Asia region, by contrast, have recently taken steps to expand the expected role of the military in humanitarian relief operations.

In several regions, governments have established fora to foster dialogue and joint action on disasters with their respective Ministries of Defence and the Armed Forces. The Inter-American Defense Board is working on Guidelines and Proceedings, for example, as well as extensive work by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) on civil emergency planning. In the Asia-Pacific region, the Asia-Pacific Conferences on Military Assistance to Disaster Relief Operations (APC-MADRO) have brought together civilian and military experts from at least 30 countries and regional and international humanitarian organisations to develop a draft set of guidelines aimed at ensuring effective and principled foreign military assistance during disasters.<sup>104</sup> The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has formed a Joint Coordinating Committee on the Use of Military Assets and Capacities in the provision of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief. The joint committee will be involved in facilitating joint exercises involving military forces from all ASEAN countries, and eventually aim to carry out joint relief operations.<sup>105</sup> Many of the Pacific Islands also have a longstanding understanding with Australia and New Zealand that these countries military assets, in particular their air forces, can be used to respond to natural disasters on their territory. Similar arrangements exist between the US military and some Caribbean countries.

# 4 International initiatives to improve the quality and accountability of international assistance

## 4.1 Background to the rise in self-regulation

In an age of satellite television and the internet, news of a terrible flood, earthquake or hurricane reaches around the world instantly. People and organisations around the world are inspired to quickly try to ‘do something’ to help those in need. This is particularly the case when the scale of the disaster overwhelms the government’s capacity to respond, as in the recent Haiti earthquake. This charitable impetus can result in relevant and valuable aid being delivered, but it can also result in donations that are inappropriate, sent in haste and not in line with the real needs of affected communities.<sup>106</sup> Anytime a new organisation is rapidly setting up operations in another country, there is great potential for misunderstanding, ineffectiveness and even harm, due to a lack of familiarity with the local context.

The 1990s saw an increase in the size of the humanitarian aid sector, as agencies entered even more difficult conflict environments. As one report notes, around this time ‘there was a growing sense of unease among some agencies and individuals about the range of standards and performance to which different agencies operated.’<sup>107</sup> This gave rise to initiatives such as the ‘Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief’, described below.<sup>108</sup> In 1994, the international aid response in the aftermath of the Rwanda genocide was sufficiently chaotic, ineffective and in some cases harmful as to prompt serious hand wringing and reflection. This crystallised in the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, one of the largest collaborative evaluation processes of humanitarian aid ever undertaken.<sup>109</sup> The evaluation was critical of NGO performance, and one study within the joint evaluation recommended some form of self-managed regulation or accreditation of NGOs to monitor compliance.<sup>110</sup> The Rwanda evaluation gave impetus to several projects that were already underway to develop best practice for international disaster response, and these eventually formed into the Sphere Project, described below. However, ‘the more challenging and radical recommendations around accreditation and regulation of NGOs were ducked’.<sup>111</sup>

In addition, the Code of Conduct and Sphere, there have been a range of other initiatives within the international aid sector to enhance quality and accountability. This section attempts to describe some of the major ones, as well as initiatives to establish international accreditation or certification schemes. In particular, it focuses on what these initiatives mean for the role of the host state in disaster response. Do these standards or guidelines apply to the host state? Which of these tools could the state use these tools to distinguish between international humanitarian actors and how?

## 4.2 Quality and accountability initiatives

In the last fifteen years, actors in the international humanitarian community, including donors, international organisations, UN agencies and NGOs, have launched a variety of initiatives aimed at self-regulation, peer-review and the development of common standards. These are designed to increase the accountability of international humanitarian assistance actors to a variety of

stakeholders, notably aid recipients. These principles and technical guidance seek to orient humanitarian assistance and donations in a way that is relevant, effective, timely, coherent, efficient and full of impact. Although the initiatives listed below are voluntary, and lack enforcement mechanisms, they point to an increasingly widespread recognition of the need for greater accountability of humanitarian actors to the communities that they serve.

Although most UN agencies and larger NGOs already have internal technical standards, especially within particular sectors, there is broad agreement on the usefulness of an inter-agency approach. This is in part a reflection of the level of inter-dependence at the field level, but there is also a sense in which the larger agencies have engaged in norm setting for the sector as a whole as a way to establish legitimacy and affirm their reputation as professional organisations (especially for NGOs) in the eyes of outside observers, including donor governments and host governments.

In the 2000s, as the number of such initiatives has grown, there has been some concern about potential overlap and duplication. Since many of these initiatives have developed their own training materials, staff in the field are sometimes confused about how the initiatives relate to one another. In 2008, some of the main quality and accountability initiatives formed a loose grouping in order to identify synergies and clarify their differences.<sup>112</sup> Another notable effort to summarise and make sense of the multiple initiatives is the ‘database of civil society self-regulatory initiatives’ compiled by the One World Trust. The database includes a section on ‘humanitarian / emergency relief’ initiatives, most of which are covered below.<sup>113</sup> This section does not cover the work of research institutes or political fora or platforms that work to improve the quality of humanitarian aid indirectly.

### *The Code of Conduct*

The Code of Conduct of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief was a first step to define and clarify a number of ethical principles in humanitarian work. The Code was drawn up by the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response in 1992 and was ‘noted’ and ‘welcomed’ in 1995 at the 26<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. It is a voluntary code seeks to maintain standards of independence, effectiveness and impact of disaster response NGOs and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Because of the importance and succinctness of the Code, it is worth stating its ten principles here:

1. The humanitarian imperative comes first;
2. Aid is given regardless of the race, creed or nationality of the recipients and without adverse distinction of any kind. Aid priorities are calculated on the basis of need alone;
3. Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint;
4. We shall endeavour not to be used as an instrument of government foreign policy;
5. We shall respect culture and custom;

6. We shall attempt to build disaster response on local capacities;
7. Ways shall be found to involve programme beneficiaries in the management of relief aid;
8. Relief aid must strive to reduce vulnerabilities to future disaster as well as meeting basic needs;
9. We hold ourselves accountable to both those we seek to assist and those from whom we accept resources;
10. In our information, publicity and advertising activities, we shall recognise disaster victims as dignified human beings, not hopeless objects.<sup>114</sup>

A study produced at the ten year anniversary of the Code found that people have a high appreciation of the Code for the following reasons:

- It is a body of commonly shared principles.
- It defines humanitarians next to government and military.
- It provides a common reference for discussions between NGOs and with stakeholders.
- It is a reference for discussions between humanitarian and development divisions, and between programme people and marketing.
- It is relatively concise and simple, no need for elaborate training.
- With ten years and 304 signatories, the Code has gained broad recognition.<sup>115</sup>

The Code also contains annexes with a set of recommendations for host governments, donors and inter-governmental organisations. Host governments are urged to respect the independence and impartiality of humanitarian agencies and facilitate their rapid access to disaster victims as well as the timely flow of relief goods and information. It also recommends that host governments should seek to provide coordinated disaster information and planning services. The Code states that:

The overall planning and coordination of relief efforts is ultimately the responsibility of the host government. Planning and coordination can be greatly enhanced if Non-Governmental Humanitarian Agencies (NGHAs) are provided with information on relief needs and government systems for planning and implementing relief efforts as well as information on potential security risks they may encounter. Governments are urged to provide such information to NGHAs. To facilitate effective coordination and the efficient utilisation of relief efforts, host governments are urged to designate, prior to disaster, a single point-of-contact for incoming NGHAs to liaise with the national authorities.<sup>116</sup>

Despite the inclusion of the host government in its recommendations, and the statement of the government's centrality, some have argued that the value of the Code is that it marks humanitarian non-state actors as 'different'. In 2004, Hugo Slim noted that Code can act as a 'differentiator or identifier', between people who own and share the Code and different non-state and military actors working in the same environment.<sup>117</sup> Although governments may wish to endorse aspects of the Code, the document is primarily a tool for NGOs (particularly though not explicitly international NGOs) and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

As mentioned, the Code enjoys very broad support, and a wide variety of organisations seek to uphold its principles. Several governmental donors require funding recipients to sign on to the Code, and signatories of the ‘Good Humanitarian Donorship’ principles have pledged to promote the Code. The Code does not have a secretariat, or a self-reporting or accreditation mechanism, however. Thus while useful for disseminating and reinforcing the importance of a set of principles, the Code probably has limited value for host states in distinguishing between response organisations. It is very simple for any organisation to sign on to the Code of Conduct.

### *The Sphere Project*

As described above, the Sphere Project was launched in 1997 and culminated with the publication of the Sphere ‘Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards for Disaster Response’ in 2000, which is commonly referred to as the Sphere Handbook. The Sphere Project is an initiative to define and uphold the standards by which the global community responds to the plight of people affected by disasters, principally through a set of guidelines published in the Handbook.<sup>118</sup>

Sphere is not a membership organisation and there are no signatories to the Sphere Handbook. Rather, the Sphere Project involves a broad and ongoing process of collaboration whereby the key messages and standards contained in the Handbook are disseminated through regular workshops, events, networking and advocacy. The handbook has been translated into 25 languages. Sphere initiatives, such as Sphere India and Sphere Honduras, have developed under the international umbrella. The Sphere Project does not have the capacity or governance structure to do a certification process; however, others are free to use the Sphere Handbook in their own such mechanism.

The Handbook was revised in 2004 and again in 2011 following an extensive consultation process. This included not just international actors but also governments.<sup>119</sup> Like the Code of Conduct, Sphere is geared primarily at international actors. However, the 2011 Handbook ‘encourages’ other actors, including ‘government and local authorities, the military or the private sector’ to use the Sphere Handbook<sup>120</sup> and ‘to endorse the common principles, rights and duties set out below as a statement of shared humanitarian belief’.<sup>121</sup> Not only is Sphere viewed as useful for governments in ‘guiding their own actions, but also in helping them to understand the standards used by the humanitarian agencies with whom they may interact’.<sup>122</sup> Lastly, it encourages those involved in disaster preparedness, including governments, to be prepared, at least, to meet the Sphere minimum standards during a future disaster.<sup>123</sup>

The 2011 edition of Sphere is also more specific on how international humanitarian actors should relate to national governments. While noting that governments may be unable or unwilling to fulfil their primary responsibility to provide relief during disasters, it calls on agencies to ‘as far as possible, consistent with meeting the humanitarian imperative and other principles set out in this Charter . . . [to] support the efforts of the relevant authorities to protect and assist those affected’.<sup>124</sup> The

importance of coordination with government authorities ‘engaged in impartial action’ is also stressed in Core Standard 2,<sup>125</sup> and the following chapters of the Sphere Handbook mention appropriate role of government in various technical sectors. Sphere also calls on states ‘to respect the impartial, independent and non-partisan role of humanitarian agencies and to facilitate their work by removing unnecessary legal and practical barriers, providing for their safety and allowing them timely and consistent access to affected populations.<sup>126</sup>

The Sphere Project views engagement with governments as a key strategic issue that needs to be taken forward. A handful of states have taken up Sphere in one way or another, such as adopting it into their disaster management law or policy, or including it as an advisory guideline. The IDRL Guidelines mention Sphere as a tool that governments can use. The core audience remains international humanitarian actors, however. It is unclear, however, how many governments will wish to require international relief actors to be compliant with Sphere, in part because the question might be posed as to whether their own efforts are Sphere compliant? At the same time, it is possible to imagine a government requiring that a certain relief items, such as tents or non-food items, be in accordance with Sphere indicators, albeit with some flexibility built in. It is important to note that while the Sphere *standards* are not flexible, the specific indicators are. For example, the standard that ‘A person affected by disaster has the right to adequate water to meet his or her daily needs’ is universal, but the indicator for this (15 litres per day) is something to aspire to, and may need to be adjusted given the context.

Sphere has sought to maintain close relationships with similar quality and accountability initiatives (many of which are described below), in order to maximise complementarity and minimise duplication. It is also currently seeking to develop ‘companion’ standards with a number of other sector-specific initiatives, including the Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction; the Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards (LEGGS) Project and the Minimum Standards for Economic Recovery after Crisis of the Small Enterprise Education and Promotion (SEEP) Network.

#### *The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP)*

The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) was established in 1997, also growing out of the joint evaluation of the response to the Rwanda genocide. ALNAP members come from across the international humanitarian sector and include donors, NGOs, the Red Cross/Crescent, the UN, independents and academics. It is dedicated to improving humanitarian performance through increased learning and accountability, mainly by producing tools and analysis relevant and accessible to the humanitarian sector as a whole.

A key tool developed by ALNAP is the Evaluative Reports Database (ERD), which facilitates information sharing and learning lessons among humanitarian

organisations. The ERD is a bibliographic collection of evaluative reports of humanitarian action, lessons learnt studies and other types of reviews. ALNAP also publishes a ‘State of the Humanitarian System’ report as well as other periodic publications on evaluation, leadership issues and innovation. It also maintains a ‘Haiti Learning and Accountability Portal’.

At ALNAP’s 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, which was held in Kuala Lumpur and hosted by the Red Cross/ Red Crescent Movement with support from Mercy Malaysia, participants discussed the role of national governments in international humanitarian response to disasters. The meeting brought together representatives from national disaster management authorities (NDMAs) around the world, with representatives from the humanitarian organisations that make up the ALNAP network. The report from this meeting is referenced below.<sup>127</sup>

#### *Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD)*

The Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative is an informal forum and network of government donors that facilitates collective advancement of GHD principles and good practices. The work of the GHD group is based on the ‘Principles and Good Practice of Good Humanitarian Donorship’ endorsed by 17 donors in 2003. There are currently 37 members of the GHD group. The principles aim to enhance the coherence and effectiveness of donor action, as well as their accountability to beneficiaries, implementing organisations and domestic constituencies, with regard to the funding, co-ordination, follow-up and evaluation of humanitarian action.<sup>128</sup>

The GHD principles are mainly focused on the effectiveness of international humanitarian actors, and in particular the role that donors play in this. The role of national governments in humanitarian response is mentioned twice. First, in reference to preparedness and DRR, the donors pledge to ‘strengthen the capacity of affected countries and local communities to prevent, prepare for, mitigate and respond to humanitarian crises with the goal of ensuring that governments and local communities are better able to meet their responsibilities and co-ordinate effectively with humanitarian partners.’<sup>129</sup> And second, in principle 5: ‘While reaffirming the primary responsibility of states for the victims of humanitarian emergencies within their own borders, strive to ensure flexible and timely funding, on the basis of the collective obligation of striving to meet humanitarian needs.’<sup>130</sup> Thus, it is notable that the reference to the primary role of the state in disaster response seems to function mainly as a qualifier for donors’ commitments to providing funding.

That said, the GHD’s current work plan includes a work stream on ‘strengthened partnership with development partners and host countries’. This has included inviting a recipient country (Pakistan) to a recent GHD meeting.<sup>131</sup> The GHD group also has a list of 11 countries with which they would like to engage more, including Mexico, South Africa, China, India among others. A meeting was held with representatives of six of these countries to introduce the GHD principles and create a platform for discussion.

### *The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP)*

The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP-International) is another international initiative that focuses primarily on accountability to the intended beneficiaries of humanitarian action. Unlike the Code of Conduct and Sphere, HAP International is a membership organisation (with around 70 total members) and seeks to monitor and report on the implementation of HAP principles. It provides support to members and potential members on adhering to the HAP principles, through training and advice.<sup>132</sup> The scheme is open to all humanitarian organisations and requires agencies to demonstrate that they meet specified performance benchmarks for humanitarian quality management; transparency; beneficiary participation; staff competencies; complaints handling and continual improvement. Certification is granted for three years subject to a compliance verification audit and mid-term monitoring.<sup>133</sup>

A recently updated ‘HAP standard’ was launched in 2010, and it aims to be more flexible and inclusive. Any stakeholder (NGO, UN agency, or government national disaster management agency) can apply it. However, at the moment, HAP members are mostly NGOs; some donors are associate members. It would be the role of HAP members rather than the HAP secretariat to ‘roll out’ the HAP Standard to governments. In Pakistan, HAP members there have invited and presented it to the counterparts in the ministries. They have shown interest, but so far no government has signed up to say they will use this. The HAP certification process is quite intense and it is difficult to imagine governments volunteering to undertake this kind of scrutiny from a non-governmental, voluntary mechanism.

In theory, governments could use the HAP Standard to ask incoming NGOs how they verify themselves. This could help the government to distinguish between different organisations. NGOs that subscribe to the HAP Standard have pledged to be accountable to not only the beneficiaries and the donors, but also the governments. HAP members have pledged not to work in any country illegally; they have to be approved by the government, and fully registered under the relevant ministry.

### *COMPAS Qualité and Synergie Qualité*

The Quality COMPAS (also known in French as COMPAS Qualité) is the result of a six-year research project (from 1999-2004) on quality issues in the humanitarian sector. It is quality assurance method that comes with its own set of tools, training modules and consultancy services. These components have been designed for aid agencies with the overall aim of improving services provided to crisis-affected populations.<sup>134</sup> The approach seeks to be context sensitive, in that it relies on questions to ask rather than responses to apply whatever the context.

Synergie Qualité is a related initiative of Coordination SUD, the umbrella organisation of French NGOs. Synergie Qualité stresses that approaches to humanitarian quality must address ethical values as well as organisational issues and technical competences. Chapters in its handbook, the *Guide Synergie Qualité*,

emphasise five themes that should prompt self-questioning. These are humanitarian ethics, corporate governance, human resource management, the project cycle and the role of the affected population. The project management chapter introduces the ‘COMPAS Qualité’ tool.<sup>135</sup> Both tools, which are available in English and French, emerge from the ‘Dunantist’ NGO tradition of being more independence and oppositional towards the government.<sup>136</sup> National authorities are mentioned as entities that need to be informed of projects, and as a potential source of unwanted interference in NGO activities, for example.

### *The Emergency Capacity Building Project (ECB)*

The Emergency Capacity Building Project grew out of an initiative of the emergency directors of seven large, Western (and Anglophone) non-governmental agencies: CARE International, Catholic Relief Services, International Rescue Committee, Mercy Corps, Oxfam GB, Save the Children and World Vision International, in 2003. The organisations were concerned with the increasing intensity of natural disasters and armed conflicts, and the strain this put on the capacity of international organisations to respond. In particular, there was concern that many organisations flood the scene of a humanitarian emergency with little or no collaboration between them. This in turn has consequences for organisations’ finances, staff capacities and accountability to affected populations.<sup>137</sup>

The first phase of the ECB Project (2005–2008) focused on the global level, and key outputs included the Good Enough Guide, the Building Trust Toolkit and the ECB Simulations Tool. The Good Enough Guide emphasises simple and practical solutions for humanitarian practitioners in the field. It encourages the user to choose tools that are safe, quick, and easy to implement. The Guide draws on the work of other NGOs and inter-agency initiatives, including Sphere, ALNAP, HAP International and People In Aid. It aims to break down accountability and impact measurement into simple ‘to dos’ for busy field staff to digest on the run, focusing on how standards, principles and guidelines can be applied in various emergency settings.<sup>138</sup>

The second phase of the ECB Project (2008–2013) involves five consortia at the field level, in Bangladesh, Bolivia, the Horn of Africa region, Indonesia and Niger. Each consortium is made up of some or all of the six ECB agencies, who work in partnership with other NGOs, UN institutions, local partners, communities, and government actors.<sup>139</sup> The aim of the consortia activities is not only to improve the performance and accountability of consortia members but also to ‘decrease the risks from disasters through local and national government policy changes’. Government departments are observer members in at least two of the consortia. In Bangladesh, for example, the consortium works in partnership with the government’s comprehensive disaster management programme (CDMP) and in Bolivia it works with the Bolivian Vice Minister for Civil Defense (VIDECICODI). In Bangladesh, ECB agencies are engaging in joint advocacy to influence the enactment of a comprehensive Disaster Management Act for the country.

### *INGO Accountability Charter*

The International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGO) Accountability Charter was launched by a group of INGOs in 2006. These included ActionAid International, Oxfam International, International Save the Children Alliance, among others. The Charter seeks to set common standards of conduct for INGOs and also creates mechanisms to report, monitor and evaluate compliance as well as provide redress.<sup>140</sup> The Charter is voluntary; signatories agree to apply the Charter progressively to all of its policies, activities and operations. The Charter does not replace existing codes or practices to which signatories may also be party.<sup>141</sup>

The Charter states that NGOs can ‘complement but not replace the over-arching role and primary responsibility of governments to promote equitable human development and wellbeing, to uphold human rights and to protect ecosystems.’ It also states that NGOs ‘can often address problems and issues that governments and others are unable or unwilling to address on their own. Through constructive challenge, we seek to promote good governance and foster progress towards our goals.’ The Charter recognises that ‘transparency and accountability are essential to good governance, whether by governments, businesses or non-profit organisations’.<sup>142</sup>

### *Other sector-specific initiatives: Human resources, education, food aid*

The People in Aid Code is aimed at strengthening NGO staff management and includes principles and indicators concerning human resources strategies; staff policies and practices; management and leadership; consultation and communication; recruitment and selection; learning, training and development; and health, safety and security. It also includes a manual providing guidance on implementing the code. While organisations can informally use the code as a good practice and self-assessment tool, they can also obtain a ‘quality mark’ from People in Aid, which verifies successful implementation through a social audit.

The Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction were developed by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) through a consultative process that involved the participation of thousands of individuals in more than 50 countries in 2003 and 2004, including Ministries of Education. They were created in 2004, updated in 2010 and have been translated into 21 languages. The Minimum Standards are designed for use in emergency response, emergency preparedness and in humanitarian advocacy and are applicable in a wide range of situations, including natural disasters and armed conflicts. They are designed to meet the needs of different types of organisations, including governments, and they include a section on ways to ensure that the Standards reinforce existing government education standards.<sup>143</sup> The INEE Minimum Standards are formally recognised as companion standards by Sphere.<sup>144</sup>

The draft revised Code of Good Conduct in Food Crisis Prevention and Management (2009) has been adapted from the 1990 Food Aid Charter and involves states, intergovernmental organisations, NGOs, OECD technical and financial partners

and civil society organisations. It consists of a set of principles and commitments concerning food security, information and analysis systems; a dialogue and consultative framework; and a strategic framework governing response to food crisis.

#### *Other initiatives on accountability to beneficiaries*

Several other initiatives are taking shape that aim to improve communication with and accountability to the recipients of humanitarian aid. These include the Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) network, a group of aid agencies, media assistance providers and OCHA, that aims to address the information needs of those affected by a crisis and improve communication with those populations. In particular, CDAC seeks to promote two-way communication, including through new technology initiatives.<sup>145</sup> Another initiative is the CDA (Collaborative for Development Action) Collaborative Learning Projects, which includes the Listening Project. The Listening Project began in 2005 and aims to be ‘a comprehensive and systematic exploration of the ideas and insights of people who live in societies that have been on the recipient side of international assistance’.<sup>146</sup> The Listening Project has organised Listening Exercises in over a dozen countries.<sup>147</sup>

The Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has also recently decided to look more closely at strengthening accountability to affected populations through two-way communication and involvement of beneficiaries in the programme cycle. The IASC ‘will explore the possibility of establishing an inter-agency mechanism to improve participation, information provision, feedback and complaint handling’.<sup>148</sup>

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### **4.3 Certification schemes**

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#### *NGO certification*

As described in section 4.1, the evaluation of the Rwanda response in 1994 contained recommendations for a system of regulation and accreditation of NGOs, which were not taken up. The Tsunami Evaluation Coalition also recommended greater investment in quality control, including agency accreditation or certification.<sup>149</sup> The response to the Haiti earthquake of 2010, in which thousands of NGOs, many of them unqualified ‘cowboy NGOs’, rushed in to help has prompted renewed calls for an NGO certification scheme. The media’s at times quite negative portrayal of the humanitarian response in Haiti has given further impetus to these calls in a similar way to the 1994 Rwanda crisis.<sup>150</sup>

It is unclear exactly what direction they will take, but there are a number of efforts underway to establish some sort of a new NGO certification process. Efforts are underway by NGO consortia to determine the minimum commitments of organisations to be included as part of a Cluster and in the Humanitarian Country Team, for example.<sup>151</sup> If it did, it would likely be driven by Western NGOs and/or a group of OECD-DAC donors, although possibly with the involvement of Southern NGOs and/or non-DAC donors. This could be similar to the schemes many DAC

donors (including AusAID and others) already have, whereby its NGO partners are formally pre-certified, including through quality checks and verification of processes and corporate standards. The Netherlands requires its NGO partners to obtain the International Standards Organisation (ISO) certificate, for example. These certification processes require extensive time and cost, so a key question will be how to make an international level certification process open to smaller and non-Western NGOs.

From the point of view of a national government that has just experienced a natural disaster, several questions remain as to how and whether such a global NGO certification scheme might be useful. First, it is important to note that in many smaller disasters, the problem is a lack of funds and responding organisations (including NGOs), not too many of them. But even for large disasters where a state is over-run by inexperienced and inappropriate NGOs, a key question would be whether the government would choose to accept only globally certified NGOs. Would it turn away NGOs that did not have the certification? How could they avoid also turning away local or regional NGOs that, although well qualified, had not obtained the certification? And what practical mechanisms would need to be in place to quickly distinguish between certified and uncertified NGOs?

#### *The INSARAG External Classification (IEC) process*

As with responding to mega disasters more generally, urban search and rescue (USAR) is a popular undertaking. SAR teams have been formed in many countries, and are increasingly interested in deploying to respond to earthquakes around the world. Even Western countries with no serious earthquake risk have formed SAR teams as a way to respond to potential terrorist attacks, for example. The plethora of SAR teams that can arrive on the scene, as well as the need to coordinate quickly and effectively to save the lives of people trapped in buildings, has sparked the creation of an effective mechanism for SAR coordination in the form of INSARAG (see section 2.3).

One of INSARAG's key tools is the accreditation process, whereby USAR teams deploying internationally are classified as 'Medium Teams' or 'Heavy Teams' through the INSARAG External Classification (IEC) process. More than 20 countries have successfully undergone the IEC since it started in 2005, while many others have shown keen interest or are preparing their USAR teams for upcoming IECs. IEC teams are well recognised by the INSARAG tab they wear, and have most recently responded in earthquake-affected countries such as Indonesia, Haiti and Japan.<sup>152</sup>

This aims to ensure that qualified and appropriate USAR resources are deployed accordingly. The request for this accreditation came from the SAR teams themselves, who wanted to be seen as 'internationally certified' according to the INSARAG Guidelines. As noted in the introduction to the Guidelines, an IEC 'is a demanding process that is not to be underestimated. It requires the total executive and operational commitment of the sponsoring agency, the USAR team as well as several other stakeholders to ensure success.'<sup>153</sup>

The USAR community has been able to achieve this level of standardisation and professionalism through the IEC for a number of reasons, not all of which are present in the humanitarian sector more broadly. First, the search and rescue period is easy to define, since it lasts no longer than ten days. The stakeholders for the IEC process are finite and are easy to identify (unlike the mind-boggling array of NGOs potentially involved in disaster response). Lastly, there is an understanding that there is a need for professionalism in response. If a team arrives too late, there is a clear risk of being criticised, not to mention failing to save lives. On the other hand, the USAR sector also has ‘cowboy’ teams that have no desire to participate in system or be classified. The IEC requirements aim to be set at a level strict enough to ensure an effective response, but accessible enough to entice teams to participate.

## 5 International initiatives to improve the coordination of international assistance

The last five to six years have seen a concerted effort on the part of the international humanitarian response system to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian response by ensuring greater predictability, accountability and partnership. These efforts are known collectively as ‘humanitarian reform’. Humanitarian reform grew out of a review of the international humanitarian system in 2004 commissioned by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) Jan Egeland. This review identified major gaps in international humanitarian response capacities, especially between the UN, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and NGOs,<sup>154</sup> notably the ad hoc, unpredictable nature of many international responses. In 2005, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) introduced the cluster approach to address the problems identified in the review.

In addition to the cluster approach, another key pillar of ‘humanitarian reform’ has been improving the leadership of international humanitarian action through strengthening the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) system and establishing Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) at the field level. These initiatives are described in the following section, with a particular focus on how they relate to the host government. Humanitarian reform has also sought to address financing challenges, working the recently established financing mechanisms such as the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the Common Humanitarian Funds (CHFs). (See paper I for more discussion of financing issues.)

### 5.1 Cluster approach

The cluster approach was conceived as a way to address gaps and strengthen the effectiveness of humanitarian response through building partnerships. The basic idea is to identify a lead agency for each response sector (water, health, etc.) to provide predictable leadership and coordination and acts as the ‘provider of last resort’. In this way, the cluster approach aims to ensure predictability and accountability in international humanitarian response, by clarifying the division of labour among organisations, and better defining their roles and responsibilities within the different sectors. Each of nine response areas (sectors), as well as two service areas and four ‘cross-cutting issues’, are assigned to a lead agency or agencies or focal point. The ‘cluster lead agencies’ are mainly UN agencies but also include one international NGO, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the IFRC.

The overall goal of the cluster approach is to make the international humanitarian community more structured, accountable and professional. In theory, this should make the international system a better partner for host governments, local authorities and local civil society. In practice, however, relationships between clusters and relevant authorities have been one of the biggest challenges for the implementation of the cluster approach. Both external evaluations of the cluster approach, in 2007 and 2010, while generally positive about the usefulness of the cluster approach over all, have found the lack of alignment between the clusters and government line ministries and local authorities to be a recurrent problem. A related problem has been the only marginal participation of local NGOs in the clusters.

Working in alignment with government ministries can be challenging during a disaster, when the responsibilities of different line ministries (e.g. health, social welfare, urban planning or housing) can be unclear or shifting, as the emergency evolves from relief to recovery. But a major reason for the shortcomings is that the cluster approach was a response to deficits in the international agencies. It is thus by design oriented to deficiencies at the global rather than country level. There is no reason why clusters cannot act as clear point of contact and forum for linking international humanitarian actors to national and local authorities and civil society. To date, however, clusters have frequently integrated national and local actors either insufficiently or inappropriately, thereby undermining national ownership. Clusters too often either lack exit strategies or develop them too late and therefore neglect the importance of government involvement. Efforts to strengthen ownership have been made, but with limited success.

The most recent evaluation of the cluster approach identified various reasons for this lack of coordination or integration, including:

- Existing government- or civil society-led coordination fora are often weak or dysfunctional and government authorities often have insufficient capacities for taking over coordination responsibilities. Even where clusters are systematically trying to implement co-chair arrangements with government or local authority officials, their engagement often remains formalistic and their commitment low due to a lack of capacity and political will.
- Due to the ‘myth of speed’ and the international mindset of humanitarian response and the cluster approach, too little analysis of existing structures and capacities takes place before clusters are implemented.
- International actors have few incentives to integrate with existing mechanisms.
- The cluster approach seeks to enhance predictability, which implies less flexibility for adapting to local circumstances.

It is important to note that the problem of a lack of alignment predates the cluster system. As a recent report observes:

Regardless of whether or not clusters are used, the essential issue is the same: international coordination systems are typically not sufficiently respectful of host governments’ primary role in responding to emergencies on their soil. Government officials are not systematically invited to coordination meetings, nor is sufficient effort made to ensure that they can participate actively in them, for instance through the translation of key documents and the use of local languages.

The language issue is not trivial. As one report found in relation to coordination in the tsunami response: ‘where coordination meetings are dominated by international agencies, English becomes the medium of communication at the expense of already marginalised local participants.’

There have been examples of positive collaboration. Following the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan, twelve clusters were established, and in this instance the government was genuinely engaged. The system provided the government with an interface with the

wider humanitarian response; line ministries were able to coordinate directly with relevant agencies and the military could clearly see which actors were working in which locations. In Myanmar, clusters have strengthened regional and national response capacities, due to the involvement of the regional body ASEAN. Elsewhere, initiatives within clusters have focused on national capacities such as working groups for capacity-building of national stakeholders within the health, education and nutrition clusters and efforts. In general, clusters tend to have a clear natural government counterpart on WASH and food security, but less so on issues like protection.

Clusters have also provided a platform for joint advocacy, especially in the area of protection. In Myanmar, for example, the cluster system enabled humanitarian actors to start discussing the sensitive topic of protection with the government. In the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt), clusters feed into an advocacy subgroup of the Humanitarian Country Team. Clusters have also worked with local authorities in some instances to develop local standards, or adapting existing standards to local circumstances. This happened for example with nutrition standards in Haiti, standards for community-based child protection systems in Uganda, standards for the mental health and psycho-social support sector in the oPt, the creation of a standard referral pathway for gender-based violence cases in Uganda and Chad and rules on the multiplication of cassava cuttings to prevent the spread of diseases in Uganda.

Despite these examples of collaboration and improvement, some governments have registered their resistance to the cluster approach. A study of the national and international responses to a number of disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean noted that in the three quite different recent disaster responses examined governments that requested global international assistance in the face of major disasters, and welcomed OCHA assessment missions (UNDAC), specifically did not request that the UN system mobilise a cluster approach response. In response to the floods in Pakistan in 2007, the cluster approach was much less successful than in 2005 due to the failure of the UN country team to appreciate the government's resistance to a full-scale international humanitarian response, including a large number of clusters. In the wake of medium- to large-scale disasters, there is frequently pressure from all of the global clusters to take part in the response, especially when a joint appeal is being compiled. This can sometimes be driven more by headquarters than the field.

There is no inherent reason why the cluster approach cannot improve working relations between national governments and the international response system. As a recent guidance note stipulated, 'International humanitarian actors should organise themselves in such a way as to buttress and strengthen existing national structures . . . The more clusters can mirror or easily relate to national and local government coordination structures and plans, the better the chance of a harmonised and complementary approach to the response.' They key to such harmonisation is preparedness. Discussing potential coordination systems in advance of a disaster, e.g., through contingency planning and joint simulation exercises, should allow the clusters to be better tailored to local structures. At the time of a disaster, clusters can also improve by seeking to hold meetings at the government's offices and use communication strategies that allow national actors to participate.

## **5.2 Leadership of the international response: Humanitarian Coordinators and Humanitarian Country Teams**

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Strong leadership can make all the difference between international assistance that quickly and effectively meets people's needs, and assistance that is poorly coordinated, inappropriate or slow to arrive. A key part of effective leadership is working effectively with national actors, including the government. If the top international humanitarian personnel make it clear that working with government is a priority, this ethos will trickle down through the 'system'.

Within the international disaster response system, a key person is the UN Resident Coordinator / Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC). As RC, he or she is the in-country representative of UNDP and the designated representative of the Secretary-General. As HC, he or she is accountable to the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC). The functions and reporting lines of the RC and the HC are separate, but are often combined in one person/office. The RC/HC is responsible for overall leadership of humanitarian coordination; representing the UN system to high levels of government and other high-level liaison; and facilitating sensitive political or inter-agency agreements. The specific humanitarian functions usually include chairing the overall coordination body for the relief effort, facilitating agreement on division of responsibilities, negotiating access to emergency areas for all organisations and advocating for humanitarian concerns.

There are benefits and drawbacks to a combined (or 'double-hatted') 'RC/HC' role. On the one hand, an RC/HC is often able to better relate to governments, on the basis of close relations he or she has developed with government over time, which can be brought into the humanitarian sphere. On the other hand, particularly when the RC/HC is 'triple-hatted', i.e. also functioning as a Deputy Special Representative to Secretary-General (SRSG) for a UN peace operation, there is potential for independent humanitarian leadership to be compromised by political concerns. It is also questionable whether it is feasible for one individual to have so many functions and responsibilities without strong policy advice and support. However, the double-hatted model has become predominant, particularly following the opposition of some national governments to the appointment of a stand-alone Humanitarian Coordinator. Clearly a good HC will have the ability to cultivate good relations with government, but also willingness to stand up to government when needed, as well as an experience and knowledge about the humanitarian system. When this does not exist in one person, support will be needed.

Strengthening Humanitarian Coordinators was one of the pillars of the humanitarian reform efforts begun in 2005. This has involved creating a Humanitarian Coordinator pool, holding workshops and retreats to build HC capacity, as well as greater efforts to recruit women and individuals from the South. Progress has been mixed, however. One report by a coalition of NGOs was sharply critical of a lack of in-country leadership by the UN in many of the countries where the clusters are being implemented. The research found that Humanitarian Coordinators had failed to challenge governments on issues such as humanitarian space and principles, or had sidelined humanitarian issues in favour of

other considerations. It concluded that although the reasons for this are varied, and depend in part on national and local circumstances, one reason was an international perspective that focused on international systems of humanitarian response, without sufficiently considering the implications of the proposed changes for national and local government structures, or the roles of national civil society actors and NGOs.

Having experience leading humanitarian response is a key skill for HCs, as well as Resident Coordinators who may be called upon to quickly fill the HC role. In Myanmar, the acting HC played a crucial role in negotiations with government, highlighting the importance of HC leadership and humanitarian skills. By contrast, in Laos an RC and UN Country Team focused on development and, having limited understanding of emergency issues, were reluctant to switch gears for an emergency, leading to a slow response in the aftermath of Typhoon Ketsana. In response to the Haiti earthquake, the HC was not adequately or quickly provided with outside support, which was necessary given the enormity of the task and multiple roles the person was being asked to juggle.

The international response system is actively seeking to address these shortcomings. A recent letter from the ERC to UN Member States explains, ‘On leadership and coordination, the IASC Principals agreed to convene within 72 hours of a new crisis to discuss the appropriate model for coordinating international humanitarian efforts and the deployment of senior agency staff as required to support the UN Resident Coordinator and country teams, to develop a resource strategy and cover any leadership gaps.’ The IASC organisations are also aware of the ‘need to improve their alignment with national structures for emergency preparedness and response’.

Steps have recently been taken to formalise and clarify the ‘centre-piece of the new humanitarian coordination architecture established by humanitarian reform’: the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT). The HCT is meant to be established in all countries with an HC position. In countries where there is no HC position, an HCT is established when a humanitarian crisis erupts or a situation of chronic vulnerability sharply deteriorates. An HCT is also established to steer preparedness activities, if no other adequate coordination mechanism exists. The HCT is composed of organisations that undertake humanitarian action in-country and that commit to participate in coordination arrangements. These may include UN agencies, the International Organisation for Migration, non-governmental organisations (national and international), and, subject to their individual mandates, components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

Current guidance clearly states that ‘the affected State retains the primary role in the initiation, organisation, coordination, and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory. Whenever possible, the HCT operates in support of and in coordination with national and local authorities.’ In practice, however, Humanitarian Country Teams have not yet been fully established or utilised in all countries. They have also faced similar challenges to the cluster approach with respect to integration with state structures.

## 6 International initiatives to improve common needs assessments

Needs assessments are a critical part of humanitarian response. To uphold the fundamental humanitarian principle of impartiality, humanitarian aid should be based on a clear understanding of the needs of the affected population. It is common for states and humanitarian response organisations to disagree on the type and scale of needs. While this is not necessarily due to differing methodologies of assessment, having a clear and common approach to needs assessment can help to address these differences.

Current approaches to humanitarian needs assessment are lacking in several ways, however. Most relevant for this paper, there is a noticeable gap in the assessment of local capacities. Most definitions of what constitutes ‘a disaster’ include a clause to the effect that events are on such a scale that local capacities have been overwhelmed. However, international assistance actors have generally been weak at assessing the impact of disasters on local capacities. Without a proper assessment of capacities, how can agencies know when government capacity has been overwhelmed? And how can a government judge whether its capacity is sufficient in a given crisis, or whether it needs to appeal for international assistance?

Other major challenges include the fact that despite the existence of numerous methodologies within individual agencies and sectors, there is no commonly accepted methodology for assessment within the humanitarian system, or a means for putting together results from different assessments in a timely, credible and comparable way. This can make it difficult to obtain a coherent picture, especially in the initial phases of an emergency. These problems are sometimes compounded by overlap between needs assessments, wasting valuable time and creating assessment fatigue among local populations.

Since 2007, the organisations of the IASC and humanitarian donors have led a series of efforts to improve the assessment and analysis of needs at all phases of an emergency. OCHA established the Assessment and Classification of Emergencies (ACE) project to undertake a mapping exercise and other related tasks. The mapping report produced by ACE in 2009 groups the global-level initiatives into three categories: *standards-related initiatives*, which serve as a foundation for assessment tools and data collection; *primary data collection*, with a distinction between rapid and in-depth assessments; and *analysis frameworks*, where information and data generated by the two previous levels is integrated into a framework for analysis and in some cases, response planning.

Examples of standards initiatives include Sphere (described above) as well as sector-specific efforts like the Health and Nutrition Tracking Service (HNTS) and Standardised Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions (SMART), which is a standardised method to improve estimates of nutritional status and mortality rates. A wide variety of data collection initiatives exist. A number of them have been widely implemented for many years in a large number of countries and have a long-established track record. Examples include the Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA); the Household Economy Approach (HEA); the Multiple Cluster Survey (MICS); the ICRC and IFRC Emergency Assessments; the Initial Rapid Assessment (IRA) as well as additional sector-

specific tools. The third category, analytical frameworks, consists of tools that help consolidate information, as well as (for some of them) provide guidance on response planning. They include the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), the Needs Analysis Framework (NAF), the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) and Post Conflict Needs Assessments (PCNAs), among others.

The mapping study concludes that there are a large number of initiatives underway, including parallel initiatives are also underway at the regional and country levels, which could benefit from greater coordination with the global level. Core sets of indicators have not been agreed upon, nor have the definitions of key terms, such as ‘affected’ or ‘homeless’. The term ‘rapid assessment’ is often used for assessments that take closer to two-to-five weeks, beyond the strictly ‘rapid assessment’ timeline. A significant amount of the information collected is common across all the different tools. Finally, pre-crisis information and baseline information on people’s vulnerabilities and capacities does not systematically feed into rapid initial needs assessments once a crisis has occurred.

The challenges are not purely technical. Assessment can be a contentious issue within the humanitarian sector, because how assessments are done determines what the priorities will be and hence which agencies and programmes receive funds. This may explain why good practice has been slow to move forward. In 2008-2009, government donors working in the Good Humanitarian Donorship framework began to focus more on improving needs assessment. Since late 2009, the Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS), an initiative of a consortium of three NGOs, has sought to address these problems, working with a number of humanitarian actors, including the IASC Needs Assessment Task Force. ACAPS works to develop a better overall needs assessment methodology, mainly by focusing more on analysis and using existing secondary information, rather than primary data collection. This includes information collected by governments, before a crisis occurs. It is also building a roster of deployable experts and conducting trainings.

Despite advances, international aid agencies continue to overlook national capacities when they conduct assessments. As a recent report notes, “This is not due to the lack of guidelines or methodologies but because, as the Haiti response demonstrates, good practice seems to go out of the window under the pressure of a high-profile, large-scale emergency.” Changing this will likely require not just better tools or more training, but a shift in attitudes and perceptions.

## 7 Conclusions

The last fifteen years have seen a plethora of initiatives by international actors seeking to elaborate standards, principles and guidelines on what makes for a good humanitarian response. The last five of these have seen an unprecedented focus on ‘reform’. This has led to the cluster approach, a greater focus on leadership at the country level, the development of common needs assessment frameworks and new financing mechanisms, among other things.

These initiatives have undoubtedly contributed to major improvements in humanitarian response.

Their impact has been limited, however, by a failure to fully take into account national actors, including governments. Self-regulation and reform was implemented mainly in response to deficits felt within the international system, in particular in conflict settings where the state may be absent or a party to the conflict. This history and these concerns are reflected in the current state of the international response system.

Recently, international aid agencies have begun to look for ways to communicate better with beneficiaries, including through new technologies. There has been no corresponding focus on communicating better with governments. While steps are being taken by some international actors, especially in the areas of rapid response and disaster preparedness, for many key actors engaging with the state still seems to be an afterthought, not a central concern.

At the regional level, a wide range of member state organisations are forming partnerships to improve disaster preparedness and response. While the rhetoric may be ahead of the reality, a great deal of learning and norm-setting is obviously taking place, many of it off the radar screens of international-level actors. In at least one case, in response to Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar, a regional body (ASEAN) played a key role on the ground in acting as a bridge between the national government and the international system. In many other cases, however, the efforts of regional organisations appear to be somewhat cut off from those of other regional organisations, and from the broader international system.

Looking forward, more natural disasters will mostly like strike in middle-income countries. Either the international system can continue to do substitutional activities, or it can re-define its relationship with the affected state. To accomplish this, what is needed is not necessarily more initiatives, but a change in mindset. Existing work in disaster preparedness at all levels deserves more support. When governments are able to plan for how they will accept and manage international assistance, working together with international actors, there is space to build up trust between individuals and networks. The IDRL Guidelines provide a key resource in this regard. Greater collaboration between National Disaster Management Agencies (NDMAs), including through regional partnerships, should be cultivated, and the international system could do much more to support this country-to-country learning.

One way of approaching the issue is to look at how initiatives that are primarily by and for the international system, such as Sphere and Good Humanitarian Donorship, could be made more reflective of the relationship between and

among national governments, as well as national and international responders. At a more tangible level, governments could conduct more frequent evaluations and peer reviews of their own disaster response, and the international community could do much more to support NDMA<sup>s</sup> in general. The humanitarian ‘reforms’ going forward can all benefit from a greater focus on how aid agencies relate to governments. More broadly, genuine partnership will grow out of recognition that the greatest benefit for people affected by disaster will come when they can truly rely on their own government to fulfil its obligations and commitments.

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