



# **STRENGTHS IN NUMBERS: A Review of NGO Coordination in the Field**

## **Case Study: Myanmar 2008-2010**

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### **Background Note**

During the 1990s ICVA supported NGO coordination in the field in various ways and published two resource books: “Meeting needs: NGO Coordination in Practice” and “NGO Coordination at Field Level: A Handbook”. Commissioned by ICVA in 2010, this review builds on that earlier work, comprising three parts: an Overview Report introducing some key issues in NGO coordination; a series of Case Studies providing insight into how NGOs respond to those issues in the field; and a Lessons Learned bringing together critical points identified in the Case Studies.

These Case Studies include responses to both natural disasters and complex political emergencies from a range of countries around the world. The studies are specifically concerned with formal coordination bodies convened by international NGOs, although some of them include or support national NGOs. While every effort has been made to present an accurate picture of each response, gaps in the record and errors in recollection are inevitable. However any errors in the studies are the responsibility of the consultants and ICVA, and corrections and updates are welcome.

## BACKGROUND

On the night of 2 May 2008, a category 5 cyclone struck the delta of Myanmar; a vast and treeless paddy land with a high population density. The country and the humanitarian community were unprepared although news of the cyclone had been available for a week. Exacerbating delays, the Myanmar government prohibited immediate access to the affected area. However within days a few international agencies were providing aid to communities while literally thousands of local groups and individuals distributed essential relief; particularly the Myanmar Red Cross with the International Federation of Red Cross Societies and local religious networks.

There were no facilities large enough to immediately accommodate the need for coordination and information sharing, only fledgling systems in place for information collection, analysis and distribution and a dormant cluster system with no experienced cluster leads. As OCHA was not officially active in country, there was only one staff member with 'consultant' status.

There was an active in-country Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) - an inclusive meeting convened by the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC). There was an interim HC with little experience of rapid onset emergencies but on very good terms with the humanitarian community and on relatively good terms with the government.

The Paung Ku INGO Consortium<sup>1</sup> the year before (after the 'Saffron Revolution') had motivated the INGO community to make their first joint advocacy statement on the deteriorating humanitarian situation.<sup>2</sup> This was followed by the establishment a separate INGO Forum to continue and support candid discussions on the humanitarian situation in the country and decide on individual and joint advocacy initiatives.<sup>3</sup> As of January 2008 the INGO Forum had a facilitator for 3 days a month to prepare and facilitate monthly discussions.

The local NGO community was largely underground due to government restrictions on civil society organisations. Approximately 40 INGOs were directly providing services in education, health and food aid in discrete areas in the country. Few had partnership approaches to either development or humanitarian relief (4 out of 40). Only 5 INGOs and one large local NGO (LNGO) had existing but very small operations in the affected area.

Over 50 new INGOs were arriving on the scene with little or no knowledge of operating conditions, procedures and restrictions. Existing INGOs were seriously overstretched to deal with the magnitude of the disaster and were inhibited to scale up due to visa restrictions in the first 2 months. The majority of LNGOs were implementing spontaneous responses with little to no knowledge of humanitarian principles, codes of conduct and other tried and true methods for ensuring appropriate response e.g. needs assessments.

## Establishing NARGIS NGO Coordination Mechanisms

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<sup>1</sup> The Paung Ku Consortium: Burnet Institute, HIV/AIDS Alliance, Norwegian People's Aid, Save the Children, Swiss Aid and Oxfam. Paung Ku is a project aimed at providing direct support to civil society through small grants and capacity building implemented under the combined MOU umbrellas of the INGOs involved. Read Corbett, J. (2008) Helping the heroes: practical lessons from an attempt to support a civil society emergency response after Nargis, ODI/HPN Issue 41.

<sup>2</sup> NGO Statement on Humanitarian Situation in Myanmar October 2007

<sup>3</sup> INGO Forum Overview February 2008. The PK Consortium still exists to implement the PK project.

*“A lot of what (the NGO Liaison Officer did) was what OCHA should have been doing. But OCHA’s natural reflex is to look to the interests of the UN, not NGOs, because it’s not where their bread is buttered” (INGO).*

After 2 May, NGO coordination underwent several changes. The UN and in particular OCHA were seriously understaffed and visa restrictions meant that scaling up would take months. Support staff for the HC were largely volunteers, including the INGO Forum Facilitator who was ex-UN and experienced in rapid onset emergencies and information management. INGOs were particularly interested in ensuring representation within the UN-led coordination and information systems by someone with ‘their interests at heart’ and accountable to them. The fact that the existing INGO Forum Facilitator was immediately operational providing essential services such as information collection, analysis and exchange, made this person welcome immediately by stakeholders, including donors.

The Tripartite Core Group (TCG) coordination mechanism established by the UN, ASEAN and the Government of the Union of Myanmar (GoUM) in the first weeks after the emergency excluded NGOs (who were seen to be human rights activists by ASEAN and the GoUM). A member of the UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team confirmed the need for an NGO Liaison Officer, due not only to a lack of NGO representation in decision-making mechanisms, but also a total absence of LNGOs in early coordination on the UN compound.<sup>4</sup> Arrangements were made for the post to be paid for by ICVA.

A new TOR was developed by then INGO Forum Facilitator and ICVA, commented on and agreed to by the INGO Forum, the HC, the Sphere Project and Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP). These new TOR respected the continued need for an INGO Forum but expanded the role of the Facilitator to deal with additional responsibilities to the larger NGO community as well as responsibilities specific to the emergency.<sup>5</sup> The TOR of the new NGO Liaison Officer (NGOLO) made explicit reference to the *Principles of Partnership* and included facilitating constructive relationships between the ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force<sup>6</sup> that advised the TCG, the TCG itself, UN, and international and national NGOs. In addition the NGOLO was to facilitate information exchange and communication working with the Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU) and Local Resource Centre, including information on NGO registration and operating requirements. And finally, facilitating discussions and activities promoting humanitarian principles and quality and accountability (Q&A) initiatives, the latter working with HAP and Sphere.

*“OCHA cannot do everything and INGOs are not the only stakeholders in coordination. OCHA must respond to the needs of the host government, the UN, the donors and local NGOs as well. If international NGOs can organise themselves on certain issues it would be welcome.” (UN)*

Parallel to the development of the NGO Liaison function, a sub-group of the Paung Ku INGO Consortium established the Local Resource Centre (LRC) by providing space and their own senior national staff to run it.<sup>7</sup> The LRC provided local NGOs and civil society services such as Burmese-language information exchange and facilitated discussions about general and cluster-specific proceedings, technical assistance in needs assessment and proposal

<sup>4</sup> Jemilah Mahmoud was herself the then-executive director of a national NGO in Malaysia and ICVA board member.

<sup>5</sup> Terms of Reference NGO Liaison Cyclone Nargis 2008

<sup>6</sup> The ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force (HTF) was comprised of ASEAN member states. The NGOLO was invited to HTF quarterly meetings on behalf of the INGO community.

<sup>7</sup> Oxfam, Burnet Institute, World Concern

writing and a clearing house for funds<sup>8</sup>, sector-based technical training, and advocacy on behalf of local civil society. The NGOLO was considered one of the links between the LRC and the international humanitarian community and as such, while she was initially housed in the MIMU (UN complex), one month after Nargis she moved to the LRC.

Within months, the LRC also facilitated the meeting of the first Myanmar NGO Network (MNN). While the establishment of the MNN had (and has) the potential to increase the degree of organisation, representation and visibility of Myanmar NGOs, in the first year of the Nargis response, it had not established its role and reputation with all Myanmar NGOs. As a consequence it could not pretend to speak 'on behalf of' LNGOs.

Clusters were in place, several with INGO co-chairs (Education, Women's Protection and Health), some government representation (Women's Protection and Agriculture), and one with a Strategic Advisory Group (Shelter) which included a local NGO, however clusters remained in the first 6 months with some exception (Protection) a means of coordinating the international response and not the local response.<sup>9</sup>

### *NGO coordination one and two years after Nargis*

In late 2010, 2 and a half years after Nargis, the overall coordination structure has slightly changed. The TCG has been disbanded. Emergency clusters have been replaced by smaller geographic and thematic groups with improved local representation. The previous IASC is now called a Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and meets twice a month; once with a small Core Group, which includes INGO representatives and the NGO LO, and again in an all-inclusive HCT Forum which includes 2 elected LNGO representatives. There is no local NGO representation in the HCT Core Group however the UN communicates regularly and directly with 4 Myanmar NGO 'focal points'.<sup>10</sup>

By June 2010, the first Statutes of the INGO Forum were developed that formalised principles, objectives and functions, governance, structure, membership, and exit strategy (absolution of the Forum).<sup>11</sup> While there remains a reference to the NGO Code of Conduct there is no longer a reference to the *Principles of Partnership* in the Statutes. A new NGO LO is located in the LRC however her relationship with local NGOs is more ambiguous than during the emergency, largely working through a counterpart NGO LO in the LRC. In fact, the LRC staff refer to the INGO Forum Facilitator as the "INGO Liaison" to avoid confusion.

The INGO Forum continues to meet every two weeks, is responsible for electing INGO representatives to the HCT Core Group, the Myanmar Humanitarian Partnership Group (includes donors), and Committee for the Coordination of Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT)<sup>12</sup>. The INGO Forum continues to dedicate significant time to Nargis-related issues however INGOs who are not Nargis-

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<sup>8</sup> Existing projects aimed at providing small development grants to civil society were immediately transformed into emergency grants with more flexible procedures. Donors included the Paung Ku Consortium, DFID/British Council and small grants programmes of the Australians, Brits, Japanese, Norwegians, Swedish, and Swiss.

<sup>9</sup> GPPi-URD(2010), Cluster Evaluation II Myanmar Case Study, IASC and Hedlund and Myint Su (2008) Support to local initiatives; a fringe vs. mainstream response, ODI/HPN Issue 41.

<sup>10</sup> Myanmar NGO Network, Local Resource Centre, Capacity Building Initiative, Myanmar Forum.

<sup>11</sup> INGO Forum Statutes 100601

<sup>12</sup> Similarly, INGOs working in Thailand elect their own separate representatives.

only<sup>13</sup> often find the focus on the Cyclone affected areas “tedious” while understanding that it is still relevant to many NGOs as discussions on visas and travel authorisation directly affect their ability to operate. “We could be better organised - like a sub-committee on Nargis and meeting only once a month. I am frustrated with the INGO Forum but it’s better to have it than to not” (INGO).

In the meantime, the LRC continues to provide essential services to the LNGO community with an increased emphasis on research aimed at informing advocacy on INGO-UN-LNGO relations, quality and accountability (a meeting held in Burmese and led by the HAP resource pool; see below in Accountability), and emergency preparedness and contingency planning with LNGOs, the latter with the technical support of OCHA. The contingency plan has been accepted by the Department of Relief and Resettlement demonstrating unprecedented LNGO-GoUM relations. In 2011 with the support of the EU, the LRC will work more closely with the MNN. A recent 'Year 2 Review' highlighted the LRC's continued ability to adapt to the needs of its stakeholders and provide a 'neutral' space for LNGOs to meet and discuss.<sup>14</sup>

## **Governance/Administration/Membership**

In the case of INGO coordination, it is important to make the distinction between the INGO Forum and the NGO Liaison Officer, the latter having a dual responsibility during the Nargis response to both the INGO Forum and local NGOs. Before Nargis, the INGO Forum Facilitator was managed by a small (3) voluntary group of INGOs. When the Forum Facilitator became the NGO Liaison Officer (NGO LO) this Steering Committee (SC) became larger (8 ICVA member agencies). Since the ending of ICVA funding, the SC is once again reduced (3) and again focuses on the NGO LO's performance vis-à-vis the INGO Forum. The SC has no TOR and does not have a role in strategic priority setting for the INGO Forum. Instead members are consulted in plenary. At no time in the course of the NGO LO position, including immediately after Nargis, did a local NGO have a formal role in overseeing the NGO LO.

As INGO Forum Facilitator there were no reporting requirements, however as NGO Liaison Officer, she was responsible for reporting on activities to ICVA and copied to the Steering Committee every 6 months.<sup>15</sup> Since the Statutes were formalised, the NGO LO now undergoes an annual performance review with the SC.

The INGO Forum Facilitator underwent a formal hiring process in November 2007 as did her replacement in April 2009. The contract and visa were provided by an ICVA member, Save the Children, who received an overhead for administration. When the GoUM implemented an international staff quota in 2010, the NGO LO had to leave the country when her visa expired. At the time of writing, the position is vacant.

The original INGO Forum Overview included rules of membership including a commitment to participation by the country director or their designated senior manager with decision-making powers and financial contributions by members (200USD/year) or potential waiver for smaller NGOs.<sup>16</sup> This was adequate to fund an individual for 3 days/month. When the position went full time, ICVA provided

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<sup>13</sup> NGOs working in non-Nargis affected areas have different operating conditions, e.g. MOUs with a specific sector-based Ministry, different visa and travel authorisation requirements.

<sup>14</sup> LRC Year 2 Review (full reference)

<sup>15</sup> NGO LO reports and annexes are available to members of ICVA on ICVA's website.

<sup>16</sup> Initially only one NGO asked for an exemption and this was granted.

a budget allowing for admin costs paid to the LRC including meeting space, travel, and potentially a national counterpart; the latter was never done. After six months the NGO LO became part-time allowing for a contract extension with the same budget. Since 2009, membership fees significantly increased (1500USD/year). OCHA makes an annual contribution (7000USD in 2009/10). For OCHA this is a sign of "goodwill and confidence" and a "pragmatic investment"; "We can't sit in [the] meetings but we at least have access through the [NGO LO]." And while it may in practical terms have made the NGO LO more accessible to them, INGOs and the NGO LO still strongly feel the Forum to be independent.

With regards to membership, all INGOs are invited to participate or observe. Representation remains broad with secular, faith-based, large and small INGOs actively participating (at present 27 members and 7 observers the latter including IFRC, MSF-CH, MSF-F and Caritas).<sup>17</sup> As the INGO Forum continues to discuss topics that are considered to be politically sensitive, there is no initiative to invite LINGOs to the meeting. Instead the LRC, and to a lesser extent the Paung Ku INGO Consortium, are looked to "to provide guidance" on issues pertinent to LINGOs.

The TOR of the NGO LO during Nargis made explicit reference to the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, the *Principles of Partnership*, and Quality and Accountability (Q&A). As such the NGO LO facilitated an Accountability and Learning Working Group (ALWG) in collaboration with agency accountability "technicians". Participation in the ALWG was voluntary and discussions taken there were not binding. The NGO LO was not perceived to be an NGO ombudsperson however observations on ICVA members respect for the *Principles of Partnership* were included in the two reports made during the ICVA contract.<sup>18</sup>

## ROLE and ACTIVITIES

### *Information sharing and coordination – Changing needs and capacities*

In the first month, the role of the NGO LO was highly integrated with information management in the absence of a developed humanitarian information system. Remembering that a multi-agency needs assessment was prohibited in the first two months, NGOs and the Myanmar Red Cross Society were doing their own ad hoc assessments. The NGO LO worked with Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU) to collect and collate basic information on numbers of affected, deceased and priority needs, as well as basic Who, What, Where data from NGOs.

*"(The NGO Liaison Officer) knew everyone, knew what was needed, knew where to get it and fast. (The NGO liaison Officer) could deliver" (Donor).*

Once MIMU was functional, information sharing by the NGO LO shifted to opportunities and events relevant to NGOs including TCG and donor meetings, multi-agency needs assessments, and decision-making that required NGO input. Prior to Nargis, the INGO Forum had developed an NGO Security Tree with contact numbers; the NGO LO and an NGO head of agency later became the points of entry for the UN security communications.

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<sup>17</sup> However, unbeknownst to the INGO Forum or NGOLO, French INGOs were meeting separately in the first 4 months.

<sup>18</sup> There was one occasion when the NGO LO report noted a lack of local partnership by one particularly large INGO. Upon reading the report, the INGO Board member requested an explanation from the Programme Director. This is the only case where an attempt was made to hold an INGO member to account for the principles of partnership.

Other activities included facilitation of regular INGO Forum meetings, attendance at local NGO meetings, and well developed and accurate email and SMS lists for quick succinct messages including security events. With regard to coordination and information sharing with local NGOs, the NGOLO facilitated meetings between OCHA, MIMU and the LRC as well as inter-agency field visits to assess effectiveness of coordination mechanisms from a local NGO perspective.

### *Relationships, Partnerships and Collaboration*

A key role of the NGO LO was getting people to talk to each other; UN-INGO, UN-LNGO, INGO-LNGO; identifying needs for networking and organising appropriate events, services, or one-on-one meetings to meet those needs. The LRC also developed, with the help of the NGO LO, a local NGO database whose contents were shared as appropriate with MIMU. This database also facilitated a type of 'dating' service between INGO and UN agencies looking to partner with local NGOs. While these services and activities were exploited by stakeholders, they were not evaluated as to their efficacy. Outputs with regard to workshops on improving INGO-LNGO relations were shared with the INGO Forum but no commitments were ever made by the INGO Forum, to follow up on recommendations.<sup>19</sup> With regards to the UN, while overall the role of the NGO LO was appreciated (and in fact OCHA now financially contributes to it), some UN staff felt that the expression of independent opinions of NGOs could be antagonistic. The NGO LO regularly consulted the INGO Forum on the appropriateness of her behaviour vis-à-vis the UN (and other stakeholders): "We [INGOs] preferred the NGO LO err on the side of assertiveness as the [humanitarian] system is not designed to take feedback unless forced to...Whenever I heard the UN complaining about [the NGO LO] I knew she was doing her job" (INGO). The UN was, and is, not invited to INGO Forums as INGOs felt there were other forums for UN-INGO discussion, e.g. the HCT.

### *Advocacy*

After the demonstrations in 2007, INGOs had made a commitment to advocacy and had organised themselves to do this through the INGO Forum. They explicitly recognised "different INGO approaches to advocacy given the sensitive political environment" and did not try to promote consensus. These differences were less apparent in a natural catastrophe, thus INGOs in Myanmar were able to make regular organised statements to the UN, GoUM, ASEAN, and donors throughout the Cyclone Nargis response.<sup>20</sup> Refugees International made the observation that humanitarian agencies were more active in this regard than ever before (personal communication, March 2009). However some interviewees for this case study believed INGOs still "didn't go far enough", e.g. no mention was made of sanctions and their impact on the provision of humanitarian aid. Nor did the INGOs avail of the advocacy opportunities available through ASEAN but preferred to work through the UN. Convening and facilitating meetings with the objective of deciding common INGO positions and priorities was a significant part of the NGO LO role.

As mentioned, advocacy regarding improved INGO-LNGO partnerships was on both the NGO LO and the LRC's agenda, not least due to the insistence of donors that INGOs work with local partners in some cases to qualify for funds, e.g. the Livelihoods Trust Fund (LIFT) used to fund Nargis recovery

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<sup>19</sup> The "Reflections" workshop identified areas in need of improvement such as the non-conducive conditions for engagement/coordination, attitudes toward local NGOs, operational relationships, and capacity building. (NGOLO, Summary of Reflections Workshop, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> Numerous INGOs statements at TCG Roundtables (Mar and Nov 2009), NGO perspectives on CERF and the Livelihoods Trust Fund (LIFT), articles in Humanitarian Exchange, a Joint INGO response to criticisms of the Nargis Humanitarian Response (John Hopkins University et al), and collaboration with Refugees International were important efforts made by INGOs and facilitated by the NGO LO.

activities. There was and remains a concern that "not all agencies are good at partnerships and unless they are committed, they are not going to do it well".<sup>21</sup> While the LRC continues to provide information on the effect of INGO programmes at community level and on the organisational development of local NGOs, and the INGO LO facilitates presentations and discussions on the issue, there is as yet no formal commitment by the INGO Forum to address these issues. "Some INGOs are pushing their weight around but there is no place where these issues get solved. If we (small INGOs) are unhappy, local NGOs must be even more unhappy."

### *Facilitating sharing and learning around accountability*

At the time of Nargis, the cluster system did not accommodate cross-cutting issues of accountability such as Codes of Conduct, minimum standards in information/transparency, participation of local communities, and feedback mechanisms.<sup>22</sup>

Within two weeks of the cyclone, the NGO LO facilitated the first Accountability and Learning Working Group (ALWG) with 'accountability' technicians from different agencies including World Vision and Care. Stakeholders were asked what would be useful to them and the NGO LO did not pretend to be monitoring agencies' accountability practices.<sup>23</sup> For 6 months, the NGO LO worked very closely with the LRC and visiting consultants from HAP and Sphere to support the ALWG. Eventually the ALWG was supported by a DFID-funded Q&A consultant who established and trained a HAP Resource Pool of Myanmar staff including the LRC Q&A manager, who together continue Burmese-language Q&A support for international and local NGOs.<sup>24</sup>

With regards to monitoring accountability to communities, the ALWG was responsible for evaluating system-wide performance vis-à-vis the accountability indicators in the Integrated Management Matrix (managed by OCHA/MIMU and contributed to by the clusters). However while the ALWG may have had an influence on participating member agencies, it is unclear the impact on overall degree of accountability. Three rounds of the World Bank's Social Impact Monitoring (SIM) reveal no change in the degree that villagers can influence the what, how and to whom aid is given (World Bank, 2008, 2009 and 2010).

## LESSONS LEARNED

- From interviews, it is clear the importance of establishing a **shared field-based demand for NGO Coordination** through consultation with stakeholders, including UN and local NGO representatives.

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<sup>21</sup> In 2010, this prompted the LRC and Oxfam to undertake a Partnership Study, which found that most INGO-LNGO "partnerships" were no more than sub-contracts and may in fact undermine the organisational development of LNGOs. The study heavily recommended greater transparency in contractual relationships to allow local NGOs to make informed decisions about whether or not to partner with an INGO.

<sup>22</sup> In the Haiti Earthquake response Q&A were officially recognised as a 'cross-cutting issues' and an ALWG was established.

<sup>23</sup> Initial meetings focused on distributing reference materials, e.g. the ALNAP paper Cyclone Nargis: Lessons for Operational Agencies, HAP guidelines, and Sphere Handbooks, translation of key documents such as Good Enough Guide, Principles of Partnership, NGO Code of Conduct, developing a Quality and Accountability CD with reference documents, agency-specific examples, translations, etc. and sharing agency first-hand experiences in implementing accountability measures both in Myanmar and in other similar conditions and action research

<sup>24</sup> The ALWG has made a film with the Yangon Film School on accountability, research topics have included 'working with committees at the community level, coping with aid agencies, INGO-LNGO partnerships and listening projects.



- **The importance of strong field-based governance structures with mechanisms to hold NGO LO staff to account is underestimated. Where the NGO LO has a responsibility to local NGOs, governance structures must include them.** There was no consultation with local NGOs on the need for, and subsequently the TOR of, an NGO Liaison Officer. There was no local NGO on the NGO LO steering committee. This perhaps resulted in less ownership of the position by local NGOs and less use of the NGO LO for advocacy on their behalf.<sup>25</sup>
  
- **Recognising the perceived and actual influence of location, source of funding, and language on effectiveness of NGO coordination.** Being a member of the initial coordination mechanism set up under the HC's office was very valuable from the perspective of the UN and INGOs and facilitated communication and information sharing in the first month - a very fluid, hectic, and unpredictable period. Eventually the LRC was the more appropriate location for the NGO LO. Interviewees also pointed out that if the NGO LO him/herself cannot speak the local language then she must have a local counterpart.
  
- **NGO Coordination must regularly consult with and anticipate the rapidly changing demands of field-based stakeholders;** coordination in the early phase of a humanitarian response required someone to make "coordination easy". This meant providing services: two-way communication of essential information, ensuring representation of NGO stakeholders at important meetings, and establishing a space for NGOs to influence decision-making. Later as communications are better and coordination structures are in place, NGO coordination focused on relationship-building between NGOs (local and international), identifying and realising opportunities for shared advocacy and activities including joint-operations. To keep the 'mojo', it is necessary to adjust meeting frequency and agendas to meet stakeholder demands.
  
- **While a good coordinator is necessary...** An NGO coordinator must have experience working with different stakeholders, particularly sensitive to NGO-UN relationships, is pro-NGO and pro-civil society and appreciate the strengths of local NGO community. Someone who understands the subtle and often context-specific difference between representing NGOs and encouraging representation. If the NGO Coordinator is someone who is familiar with the country-specific operating environment and stakeholders, s/he will be more quickly operational.
  
- **...He/she cannot replace good institutional coordination.** In Myanmar the institutionalisation of coordination through the LRC had benefits during and after the emergency. The Real Time Evaluation recommended that Local Resource Centres be a standard international response and in Myanmar, be established at hub level to increase outreach to and participation of local groups.<sup>26</sup>
  
- **Without a commitment to the *Principles of Partnership* and a means to evaluate whether or not they are being met, lip service to 'endeavouring to build on local capacity' remains just that.**

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<sup>25</sup> The LRC 'forward looking review' noted that local NGOs were unsure who the NGO LO worked for (the UN? The LRC? A donor?). Both parties (LRC/NGO LO) could have done a better job of clearly articulating the NGO LO's role (translating the TOR, having an NGO LO corner with postings of activities, events, feedback mechanisms), making the NGO LO Steering Committee more active, and ensuring NGO LO representation on the Steering Committee. It was also noted in the same review that the relationship between the LRC and NGO LO was never clearly articulated so that while the relationship was mutually beneficial, misunderstandings would be avoided if a TOR for the two bodies was developed that explained the relative responsibilities of each party; including communications (who does what and how), priorities, regular meetings, representation, etc. The manager of an LRC-like organisation would also be integral to the NGO LO Steering Committee.

<sup>26</sup> Turner, et al (2009) Real Time Evaluation of the Cyclone Nargis Response in Myanmar, IASC.

- Facilitating **LNGO participation in mainstream coordination is not necessarily the only or the most effective way to support local response and/or improve coordination and collaboration.** Combining small grants with technical support to do needs assessments, write proposals, training in sectoral technical issues as well as humanitarian and Q&A principles is a cost-effective way to support local response on civil societies own terms (vs. subcontracting).
- There may be **benefits when there are regular discussions on Quality and Accountability** to decide common minimum standards, share experience on implementing various measures, and demand compliance with agreed upon minimum standards in operating (the latter also being a mandated role of the HC). There is enough commitment and experience now in the INGO community that simply facilitating discussions can result in learning and doing on the ground. NGO Coordination can facilitate this at two levels: 1) with heads of agency to promote common statements/recommendations to other NGOs and/or the HC, and 2) with operational staff in an Accountability and Learning Working Group-like structure which can include ‘bottom-up’ drafting of emergency-specific Q&A standards and guidelines. **However, coordination alone has not demonstrated its effectiveness of enforcing compliance** with agreed upon standards.
- **A mutual recognition of the role and relationship between NGO coordination mechanisms, HAP and Sphere can result in the benefits of networking, peer-learning and -evaluation, and sound technical advice.** Coordination structures established by INGOs who are simultaneously HAP members can be a natural entry point for HAP/Sphere technical support.

### Sources:

Eight (8) interviews with country directors of INGOs, UN/OCHA staff, the Local Resource Centre, and ICVA, NGO LO reports August 2008 and April 2009 and annexes, and reference documents in footnotes.