

The NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project II

A chance to influence
the humanitarian system

AN EXAMPLE OF DECENTRALISED COORDINATION IN PAKISTAN: THE NATIONAL HUMANITARIAN NETWORK



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Foreword

The NGOs Humanitarian Reform Project Phase II activities focus on strengthening the role of national and international NGOs in coordinating and leading response. Building on the research and advocacy achievements of the first phase of the project, NHRP II is supporting NGOs – particularly local and national organizations – to improve humanitarian outcomes for communities affected by disasters and conflict. The focus is on enhancing NGO engagement in reformed humanitarian coordination, leadership, financial mechanisms, adherence to the Principles of Partnership, and promoting accountability to affected populations.



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Introduction

The National Humanitarian Network (NHN) is a decentralised network of National NGOs (NNGOs) in Pakistan, led by an elected Chair and Central Executive Committee nationally, with provincial chapters in five provinces (AJK, Balochistan, KPK, Punjab, Sindh). Founded in mid-2010, the network has since decentralised and established provincial chapters, and has taken up a formal representational role for the N-NGO community in Pakistan at high-level coordination meetings. Given the significant and growing role of NHN in humanitarian coordination in Pakistan, and the importance of documenting its progress and the sharing of good practice between country contexts, NHRP has commissioned a case study of the NHN model and the operations of the NHN in 2013.

Aim of the study

This study aims to analyse the structure and performance of the National Humanitarian Network (NHN) and how it meets the coordination needs of N-NGOs in Pakistan. It documents constraints and good practice to inform NGO coordination in other country contexts and encourage learning based on the NHN model.

This study:

- (1) Provides a narrative of the development of NHN structures, performance and membership since its formation;
- (2) Provides analysis and discussion of the rationale underpinning the structure and operations of the NHN, and the performance of the NHN against its Terms of Reference (ToR) and stated objectives;
- (3) Assesses conditions affecting NHN participation in high-level humanitarian coordination mechanisms, and provides analysis on NHNs work in representing N-NGOs at policy level with government, UN and donor colleagues;
- (4) Identifies good practice at the federal, provincial and district levels of NHN representation, information-sharing, and advocacy work;

Methodology and scope

The report was written between 14 March 2013 and 25 April 2013 through a variety of data collection methods including desk-based research and phone or Skype™ interviews.

Background

National Non-governmental Organisations – including Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), local associations, and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) – play a critical role in humanitarian responses in Pakistan. NNGOs range in size from organisations with thousands of staff and budgets of millions of dollars to those having only a few voluntary staff and no budgets at all. NNGOs also serve as implementing partners for International NGOs (INGOs) and UN Agencies as well as implementing independently.

The exact number of NNGOs operating in Pakistan has never been officially recognised as there are tens of thousands operating throughout the country registered with different governmental agencies through different legislative acts.

While there have been several efforts to form a coalition or association of NNGOs in the past none have successfully remained in existence past the end of a certain emergency. In 2005, the number of NNGOs in Pakistan expanded exponentially to respond to the earthquake and a network called the Joint Action Committee for Earthquake Response (JAC-ER) was formed. Following the earthquake response it slowly dissolved. The same happened with flooding in 2008 and the Kech Disaster Relief Forum (KDRF) that drew together NNGOs to coordinate the response. This also dissolved following the response and was again followed by another mushrooming of NNGOs in 2010 and a similar call for coordination.

Out of this context initial creation of a National Humanitarian Network emerged in March 2010. While there had been a number of discussions about founding such a network from 2008, the catalyst was the Pakistani government's National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) calling for a single focal point for NNGOs at the, 'Interactive Dialogue on Disaster Risk Management' meetings. As an interim measure, Sungi Development Foundation was nominated as the focal organisation to lead the efforts to create the network and formed an interim working group that was later headed by a working committee comprised of five NNGOs who wrote and reviewed a Terms of Reference (ToR). This working committee later became an eight founding member executive committee that evolved into the NHN Central Executive Committee under the approval of the ToR on 14 June 2012.

Purpose

Since the creation of the interim working group in 2010, the organisation has both decentralised, establishing both a national and provincial chapters and worked to formalise its purpose. Initial discussions on the purpose of the NHN focused on the need to build local organisations capacities, strengthen governance of NNGOs, program development, as well as to improve NNGO quality and accountability. This was eventually incorporated into the NHN vision which seeks to have,

*“an efficient and effective humanitarian system being led by responsible and accountable humanitarian and disaster management institutions for the development of safer and disaster resistant communities”.*¹

They further state their mission as to:

“voice the concerns and advocate for the vulnerable and disaster affected communities for improving policies, procedures and strengthening institutions for rights based

¹ NHN Brief Profile Document.

*disaster mitigation and humanitarian response, and to strengthen the role and capacities of national and local humanitarian actors in setting humanitarian and sustainable development agendas and humanitarian action in Pakistan”.*²

Primarily, this is either accomplished, or planned to be accomplished through:

- Coordination with other stakeholders (Local government agencies, UN agencies, PHF, affected population, elected representatives, media, civil society, philanthropists);
- Representation of NNGOs at relevant forums;
- Conducting policy and advocacy research;
- Capacity and resource mapping;
- Capacity building member organisations;
- Promoting accountability principles in humanitarian responses;
- Information sharing and knowledge management;
- Promote empowered partnership according to Good Humanitarian Partnership (GHP) principles;
- Voicing needs and concerns of disaster-affected peoples.³

NHN Structure, Membership and Governance

The NHN is not a registered entity with the government of Pakistan but rather a decentralised network made up of approximately 170 national organisations who apply for membership through a simple compliance process whereby they confirm that they are registered legal entities, have prior experience working in disaster risk management (DRM) and clear strategic objectives in humanitarian response and DRM, as well as a regular audit process.⁴ Membership takes place at a provincial level where most NNGOs are situated and working.

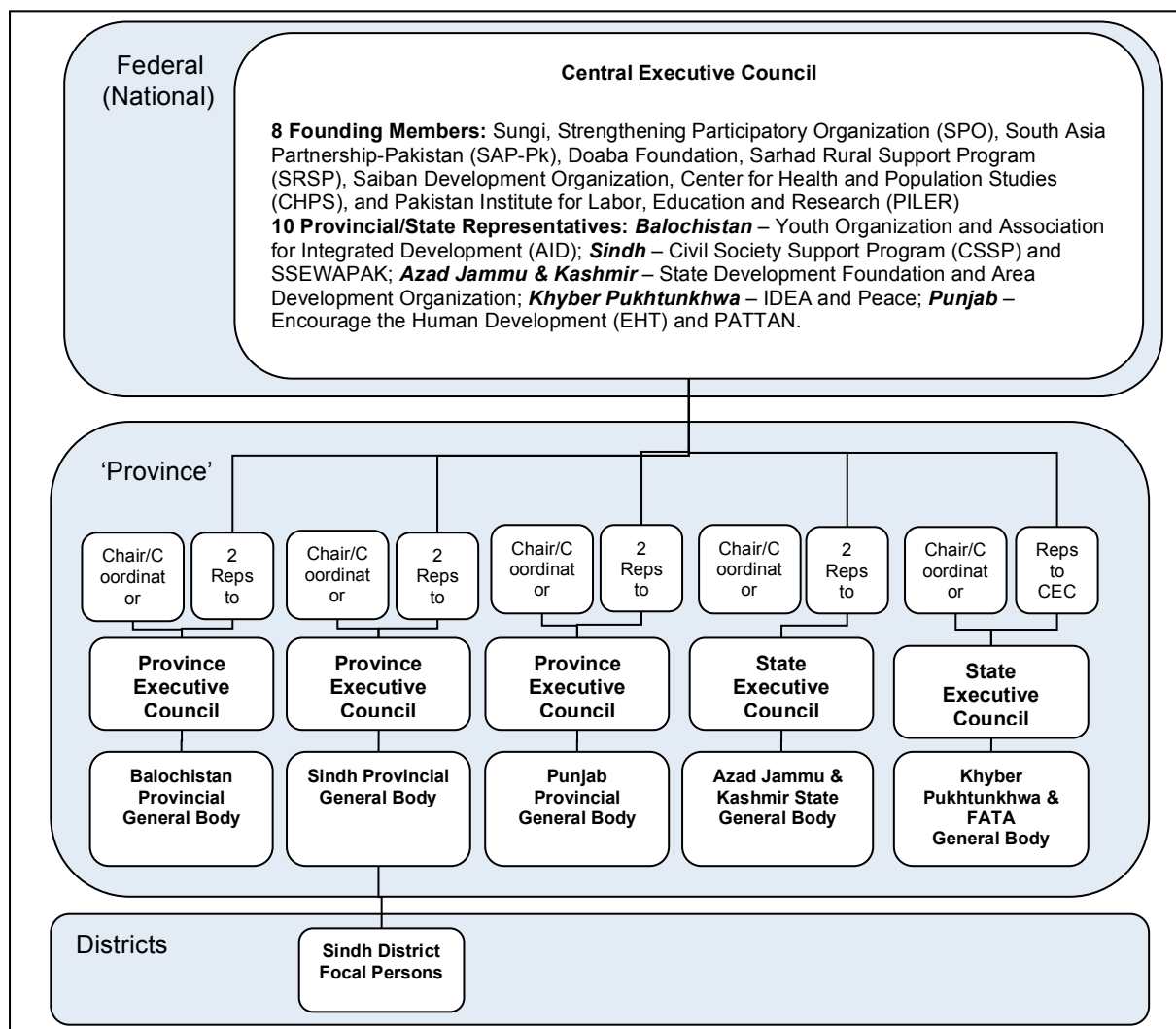
General meetings of all members take place on different schedules in different provinces. The number of meetings held and commitment of the members to the network varies by province. There has been no general meeting at a national level to date. One of the challenges cited by a NHN-CEC member is that they coordinate a vast number of small NNGOs that are very disaster-specific and do not necessarily continue to exist between disasters. This makes it difficult to build up their response capacities in order to facilitate a better response in following emergencies.

² NHN Brief Profile Document.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Bylaws and ToR NHN 2012.

The governance structure of the NHN is pictured below:



At the lowest level, the NHN members form a Provincial General Body (PGB) in five provinces/states. These bodies elect a Provincial/State Executive Council (NHN-PECs/SECs) which can have up to 15 members and serve two year terms. These PEC/SECs elect a chairperson who also serves as the Secretariat for the PEC/SEC as well as two members who represent the province/state on the NHN Central Executive Committee (NHN-CEC) thereby providing regional input into the national level decision-making body. These PGBs are independent in their day-to-day operations and management but follow NHN policies and procedures.⁵ At the time of writing, there were five PGBs in Punjab, Balochistan, Sindh, Azad Jammu & Kashmir and Khyber Pukhtunkhwa but the creation of another general body in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) had just been approved.

The NHN-CEC is the highest level of governance for the NHN and is comprised of the eight founding members as well as ten representatives from the five NHN-PECs/SECs. The NHN-CEC elects a chairperson who serves a two year term as well as a Secretariat and lead organisation. The lead organisation is responsible for all of the programmatic, operational and financial dealings of the NHN, host the Secretariat and ensure that NHN is compliant with an annual audit which has yet to occur given the relative newness of the network.

⁵ Ibid.

Provincial chapters are still in the process of developing and, with the exception of the Sindh chapter, PEC/SEC meetings are not held regularly. Most provinces do not have chapters or meetings at the district level.

Almost all, or major portions of, NHN meetings take place in Urdu, or, at times in local languages of the province – such as Sindhi in Sindh or Pashto Khyber Pukhtunkhwa.

One of the main constraints identified with having a more formalised, organised network was the lack of a formal, funded Secretariat at the national level. The members of the NHN-CEC are constrained by having to run, often very large, organisations which can limit the time available to dedicate to the heavy workload of voluntary management of the NHN. While this could be alleviated by the creation of a full-time secretariat there are some in the CEC who do not want the network to become dependent on external funding and others who are cautious that external funding could detract from the substantial voluntary efforts being made by NNGOs currently. It was the opinion of one CEC member that they would only accept funding if it was institutional and principled where the funded Secretariat could shift between organisations so no one organisation could be seen to be benefitting. It was also suggested that the key to any funding would be that it is sustainable and that it prioritised the work of provincial chapters over the national level.

The Sindh PGB has followed a different model having a single, full-time paid manager who handles the day-to-day functioning of their general body. All the Sindh members pay a nominal fee which is collected to cover the salary and basic operating costs. This is currently being considered a model for other provincial general bodies.

Development of the Sindh Provincial Body

One of the noted strengths of the NHN has been the development of provincial and district coordination. Detailed here is how the Sindh body/chapter developed.

The NHN-CEC visited Sindh in September, 2011 during a flood emergency for which neither the government nor UN had issued an appeal. Fourteen NNGOs attended an initial meeting agreeing to select the Civil Society Support Program (CSSP) as the Sindh Provincial Coordinator thereby assuming Secretariat responsibilities.

The new Provincial Coordinator visited nine of the flood affected districts and organised meetings with local organisations to inform them of NHN and collaborate on the response. At that time there were approximately 40-50 local organisations in each district and they selected a focal person in each meeting. Following each meeting a press conference was held to highlight the severity of the situation and demand the launch of a government and UN appeal. Additionally, in each district the District Coordination Officer responsible for disaster response was introduced to the new focal person and informed of NHN's support.

A month later, the first NHN Sindh Conference was held in Hyderabad coordinating amongst the various district focal persons. The Sindh Provincial Coordinator was then able to present the findings of the conference at a national level for the international NGO (INGO) forum, PHF, in Islamabad.

The NHN organised response to the flooding in Sindh resulted in approximately 350 organisations becoming members of the NHN with regular attendance at NHN district meetings being 25 organisations.

NHN Sindh representatives now regularly participate in the provincial inter-cluster coordination meetings (ICCM) held by UN OCHA as well as General Coordination Meetings (GCM) conducted by the government. The NHN provincial coordinator is in regular communication with the Provincial Disaster Management Agency (PDMA).

The Sindh PGB also organised a simulation for 150 participants in July 2012 in cooperation with the province's government Relief Department, provincial authorities, UN agencies, INGOs, PDMA, DDMA and nine districts. All participants shared their contingency plans and current coordination and communication mechanisms were tested to test for future emergency flooding.

The Sindh chapter currently has a full-time coordinator to facilitate its work. NHN members in Sindh pay a nominal amount in order to meet his salary and the coordinator sits within CSSP and receives administrative support from the organisation.

In addition to support from its members the NHN has also received support from Oxfam, Care International and ICVA through the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project II. Most of this support has been in the form of facilitating conferences, workshops and capacity building. An example of collaboration with other organisations includes a review of the flood response in 2012 funded by Care International and the issuance of two joint press releases with the PHF.

Information Management & Flows

Given the geographic spread of the country a majority of communication within the NHN is primarily conducted by phone or email. Internet and mobile networks are readily available and affordable making this an effective means of communication. While the NHN CEC meets on a quarterly or bi-annual basis they remain in frequent communication by phone and email. Provincial coordinators cited that this is how they normally share information – such as their meeting minutes, and information requested by national-level coordination meetings such as the HCT and NDMA - with the NHN-CEC as well as how they collect and disseminate information from the district level. District focal persons also frequently travel, when and where possible, to the PEC/SEC meetings which are held intermittently. Strengthening information flows is an identified area of work for the network as it goes forward.

The NHN has also developed a basic website: <http://nhnpakistan.org/> which is in the process of further development.

Engagement in National and International Humanitarian Architecture

The NHN is recognised as the formal representation of NNGOs at national level humanitarian coordination meetings, such as the UN Humanitarian Coordination Team (HCT), on the Executive Committee for the PHF, although this has not been utilized, and with the government humanitarian meetings such as the Policy Coordination Meeting (PCM). International NGOs, the UN and the government now all look to the NHN to represent the voices of NNGOs as well as disseminating information back to them. NHN representatives cited this as one of the primary aims of NHN as otherwise the local voice can be marginalised in international coordination. They also felt that being able to contribute to press releases and advocacy messages and information disseminated by the PHF lent credibility and strengthened an overall NGO voice.

Given the constraints previously noted and the voluntary basis on which the NHN operates there is often a heavy burden placed on NHN-CEC members. While the establishment of a Secretariat could alleviate this it is not something the network is rushing to do given the concerns cited previously. CEC members share the workload of representation at coordination meetings by determining in advance who can attend certain meetings and trying for a level of continuity at priority meetings.

Interestingly, while stakeholders of the international humanitarian community interviewed tended to refer to meetings like clusters and the HCT as collective of the entire humanitarian architecture, national actors interviewed tended to draw a distinction and refer to these as 'international coordination'.

Several NHN representatives noted that both INGO and UN coordination is dominated by English with which it can be difficult for some NNGOs to understand and engage. This was expressed to be a more acute problem at provincial and district levels. Additionally, one representative noted that meeting style of international coordination meetings, like clusters, often demanded active engagement from participants where disagreements with an issue, decision or action are publically voiced. It was suggested that this was difficult for women at local levels where there might be a cultural expectation that they do not speak publicly or for those who feel that it is rude to contradict or voice contrary opinions in public.

The relationship with the PHF (the INGO forum) is cordial and cooperative and there has been discussion of combining the forums into one. However, both NNGOs and INGOs preferred to keep them separate as each group has different cultures, perspectives and challenges. A close relationship exists between the two with a member of each receiving all the correspondence the other disseminates publicly. In addition, the NHN-CEC conducts meetings in Urdu which precludes many INGOs from engaging.

Development and the Future of the NHN

Since 2010 the structure of the NHN has continued to evolve with a devolution toward provinces and local levels matching the 18th Amendment added to the constitution in April 2010 which also strengthens provincial level governments. Previously, some smaller, or provincial NNGOs, felt that the NHN was a 'national' network in name only and only operated at a federal level while ignoring the provinces and allowing larger, more prominent NNGOs to dominate the agenda.

The NHN leadership has also developed a strategic plan to help focus the direction of the network. Part of this will be to ensure accountability mechanisms for NHN members and the NHN-CEC has planned to develop a code of conduct that would have to be accepted by all members and a compliance mechanism.

A recognised strength of the NHN by INGOs is their ability to bring national and local government together in forums and workshops and the body has plans to continue this especially in terms of facilitating good relationships with local governments. Since 2010 a number of workshops and meetings have been held by the NHN which have been cited by interviewees as strengths. The NHN has facilitated trainings and meetings at a provincial and district level on humanitarian principles, humanitarian architecture, accountability and disaster risk reduction. National leadership trainings and evidence based response as well as contingency and strategy planning workshops have also been held.