

The NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project

A chance to influence the humanitarian system

Fit for the future? Strengthening the leadership pillar of humanitarian reform



act:onaid



This study was commissioned by the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project, and conducted and authored by Andy Featherstone.

The Project started in September 2008 with the aim of increasing the effective engagement of international, national, and local NGOs in humanitarian reform (clusters, humanitarian financing, and Humanitarian Coordinator strengthening).

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Acronyms

ALNAP	Active Learning Network on Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
CAR	Central African Republic
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CHAP	Common Humanitarian Action Plan
DFID	Department for International Development
DOCO	Development Operations Coordination Office
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ERC	Emergency Relief Coordinator
FMR	Forced Migration Review
DRLA	Disaster Resilience Leadership Academy (at Tulane University)
DSRSG	Deputy Special Representative to the Secretary-General
GHP	Global Humanitarian Platform
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HCAP	Humanitarian Coordinator Assessment Panel
HC/RC	Humanitarian Coordinator/Resident Coordinator (double-hatted role)
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
HFP	Humanitarian Futures Project
IAAP	Inter-Agency Assessment Panel
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NHRP	NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project
OCHA	Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PoP	Principles of Partnership
RC	Resident Coordinator
RCAC	Resident Coordinator Assessment Centre
RDT	Regional Director's team
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team

Executive summary and recommendations

Introduction and methodology

When it was rolled out in 2005, the aim of humanitarian reform was to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian response by ensuring greater predictability and accountability in two ways: through strengthening leadership and co-ordination, and through the creation of a Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). Five years on, the reforms are now widely regarded as the prevailing humanitarian response paradigm, and strenuous efforts have been made to review the successes and challenges of many of these ways of working. However, the one area that has benefited least from scrutiny is the leadership pillar, widely considered to be the most crucial element in making the rest of the components effective.

This paper will review the steps taken to strengthen humanitarian leadership, so that we can document the progress and highlight the challenges that continue to hamper effective humanitarian response. Recommendations will be made about ways to strengthen leadership so that it is best able to meet the ambitions of humanitarian reform.

This research was commissioned by the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project (NHRP). An initial literature search and review provided a core set of documents that underpinned the research and contributed to the development of an interview matrix to guide the study. A number of themes were then explored through the use of semi-structured interviews with a broad range of stakeholders, including UN agency staff, humanitarian coordination staff, NGO headquarters staff and field workers, and academics in a range of different contexts. A field trip to Ethiopia provided an opportunity to gather real-time input into the research through a series of focus group discussions and bilateral meetings. An online survey was developed and circulated to participants in the study, and more broadly through NHRP member agencies, the results of which contributed to the final report.

Key findings and recommendations

The need for the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) to prioritise progress against the leadership pillar of humanitarian reform

The research highlighted important steps that have been taken to strengthen humanitarian leadership; but it has also revealed that providing consistently effective leadership of humanitarian response will require change within the UN and across the broader humanitarian community. With the arrival of a new Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), Valerie Amos, there is the opportunity to set an agenda that makes progress in this most important aspect of humanitarian reform the priority. An evaluation of

the leadership pillar of humanitarian reform would provide an important foundation to this prioritisation.

- **In light of recent high profile humanitarian challenges in Haiti and Pakistan, it is now essential that the new ERC, Valerie Amos, commissions an independent evaluation of the leadership pillar of humanitarian reform.**

Recruitment and deployment of humanitarian coordinators (HCs)

Standby capacity is a prerequisite for rapid response, and the HC pool provides a dedicated system that is able to screen and select competent individuals. However, the pool is only as good as its members. So it is essential that humanitarian agencies put forward talented individuals and participate fully in selection and appointment processes. Where some of the past decision-making processes have been flawed or fast-tracked in the name of rapid response, it will be important for the revised appointment system to be fully implemented. The ERC has an essential role to play in supporting and reinforcing this process.

- **NGOs and UN Agencies must support the HC pool by putting forward high quality humanitarian leaders, and by participating in selection and appointment processes.**
- **The ERC must demonstrate her commitment to accountable and transparent selection of humanitarian leaders through her commitment to reinforcing the HC recruitment and selection processes.**

HC management and support

The complexity of the humanitarian leadership role demands that the best possible management and support is provided to incumbents. While the foundations for performance management are in place, the reporting line between the post and the ERC is unworkable. Solutions need to be found to make rigorous performance management possible, and efforts to provide support to HCs need to be strengthened. OCHA plays a crucial part in this; and its performance in providing a consistent level of support needs to improve. Where the breadth of the role or the depth of the crisis requires it, Deputy HCs should be more widely deployed to support the work of the HC.

- **HC performance management and appraisal must be strengthened. The ERC must establish a system to provide high quality management support, and the ERC-HC compact must be embedded in a continuous performance management system.**
- **OCHA must ensure that it can provide consistent and predictable support to the HC; and strenuous efforts should be made to establish surge capacity and standby rosters to support timely deployment.**

Strengthening humanitarian partnership

The nature, frequency, and scale of today's crises demand that the humanitarian community be more than the sum of its parts. This requires talented leadership that values diversity and fosters inclusiveness. If UN agencies and NGOs are to make a commitment to supporting leadership through the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), then HCs must engage them as strategic partners, and seek to value the diversity that the humanitarian community offers. In politicised humanitarian environments where the community can easily become polarised, there is an even stronger case for ensuring that the HCT has strategic reach.

- **HCs** have a responsibility to build Humanitarian Country Teams that meet IASC ambitions for providing strategic leadership that values diversity and fosters inclusiveness.
- **Donors** have an essential role to play in viewing agency commitments to humanitarian leadership and coordination as an essential part of humanitarian business, and in providing funds to support this.
- **NGOs** and **UN agencies** that commit to participating in the HCTs should invest time and human resources at a level that is high enough to enable them to operate effectively.

Developing system-wide accountabilities

Leadership has its costs in both time and resources, but it is essential that HCT members are willing partners of the HC. Humanitarian partnership will require a far stronger commitment to working together than currently exists – and one that benefits from more harmonised accountabilities. Greater effort needs to be made to strengthen mutual accountability within HCTs as a first step towards exploring how to bring greater coherence to the collective accountability of humanitarian partners. The initiative undertaken in South Africa, where the HCT is held accountable by a regional humanitarian leadership team, may make an important contribution to this.

- The **HC** should strengthen partnership between HCT members by formalising mutual accountabilities between them through the use of work plans, and by establishing two-way feedback loops between members of the HCT and the HC.
- **NGOs** and **UN agencies** must prioritise participation in HCTs. Headquarters should ensure that HCT responsibilities are included in their staff's terms of reference (ToR), and that they are performance-managed against these duties.

- The **ERC** should significantly strengthen the effectiveness of humanitarian response by developing a system of collective accountability to ensure greater responsibility across the humanitarian community for humanitarian response.

Accountability to crisis-affected people

A focus purely on strengthening vertical and mutual accountabilities risks missing the most important link in the accountability chain between those providing aid and those in need of it. It is essential that the commitments made to crisis-affected people in the HC ToR and HCT Guidance Note become more than empty words. There is sufficient good practice in existence for ways to be found to ensure that the voice of project participants can be heard and acted on by humanitarian leaders.

- Given the impact of leadership failures on those receiving assistance, it is essential that **HCs** and **HCTs** deliver on their commitments to be accountable to crisis-affected people by adopting appropriate methodologies.
- **NGOs**, many already with considerable experience in accountability to crisis-affected populations, should actively support HCT and system-wide efforts to improve accountability.

Upholding humanitarian principles

In some of the most complex humanitarian environments where there is the greatest humanitarian need, the lack of a collective understanding of and approach to promoting and defending principles is one of the most significant challenges facing humanitarianism. A humanitarian leader with relevant experience can be a strong advocate for defending and upholding humanitarian principles. Where politicised environments and aid coherence agendas do not permit this, a collective commitment to transparency will offer the best possible chance for constructive coexistence.

- **Strenuous efforts must be made by HCs** to broker the application of humanitarian principles within the diverse membership of the humanitarian community, and to defend these robustly when they are under threat.
- Where fractures run deep within the humanitarian community, an approach by the **HC** that seeks to establish commonalities, defend bottom lines, and promote coexistence through transparent communication should be vigorously adopted.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the research

When it was rolled out in 2005, the aim of humanitarian reform was to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian response by ensuring greater predictability and accountability through strengthening leadership and co-ordination, and through the creation of a Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). Two years later, in 2007, a further component – partnership – was added. While each of the four pillars of humanitarian reform is important in its own right, they are also inter-linked, and together they represent an ambitious effort by the humanitarian community to reach more people with more comprehensive needs-based relief and protection in a more effective and timely manner.

Five years on, the reforms are widely regarded as the prevailing humanitarian response paradigm, and significant time has been invested by many different organisations and research institutions in reviewing the successes and challenges of these ways of working. What they have learnt has contributed to important changes. But one area has benefited little from this scrutiny: the leadership pillar, widely considered to be the most crucial element in making the rest of the components effective. To date there has been no system-wide evaluation of humanitarian leadership. Of the three original components of humanitarian reform, it remains the only pillar not yet evaluated.

While there has been growing interest in the contribution that humanitarian leadership makes to coordinated humanitarian action, less attention has been focused on reviewing the effectiveness of the humanitarian leadership architecture from the perspectives of those who work in it or interact with it. This paper will seek to explore this in greater depth, with a view to documenting its successes and the challenges it faces. The paper will also make recommendations about how humanitarian leadership can be strengthened so that it best copes with the considerable pressures placed on it. With two of the largest humanitarian catastrophes of modern times – in Haiti and Pakistan – occurring within six months of each other, recent humanitarian history serves to emphasise the importance of stimulating constructive debate in this critical area.

1.2 Methodology and research themes

The research was commissioned by the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project (NHRP)¹, the steering committee of which supported the development of terms of reference (ToR) to guide the work (see Annex 3). The revised Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) Terms of Reference formed a foundation for the study. From this a number of themes were identified that are considered fundamental for successful humanitarian leadership. Conversely, they are often the subject of fierce debate when humanitarian leadership is considered to be failing. The themes include the following:

- Key competencies of the humanitarian leadership post
- HC and HC/RC selection and appointment processes
- Facilitating partnership across the humanitarian community
- Leadership of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT)
- HC performance management and support
- Accountability of the humanitarian leader, collectively between humanitarian partners and to crisis-affected people
- Upholding humanitarian principles and defending humanitarian space.

An initial literature search and review provided a core set of documents that underpinned the research and contributed to the development of an interview matrix to guide the study. Each of the seven themes was then explored through the use of semi-structured interviews with a broad range of stakeholders, including UN agency staff, humanitarian co-ordination staff, NGO headquarters staff and field workers, and academics in a range of different contexts.² A field trip to Ethiopia provided an opportunity to gather real-time input into the research through a series of focus group discussions and bilateral meetings. An online survey was developed and circulated to participants in the study, and more broadly through NHRP member agencies, the results of which contributed to the report and recommendations.³

1 The NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project is a three-year action research study that began in September 2008 (funded by DFID) with the objective of increasing the effective engagement of international, national, and local NGOs in humanitarian reform (clusters, humanitarian financing, and Humanitarian Coordinator strengthening). The project particularly emphasises the catalysing of NGO engagement in humanitarian reform processes.

2 See Annex 2 for a list of participants.

3 See Annex 4 for an analysis of the results of the survey.

While the limited time available to undertake the study meant that not all avenues of enquiry could be explored, the knowledge shared by the NHRP Humanitarian Reform Officers (based in Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Afghanistan) and the generous support offered by extremely busy NGO and UN staff meant that a lot of ground could be covered in a short time.

1.3 Introduction: Humanitarian leadership practice, progress, and pitfalls

The NHRP synthesis study⁴ highlighted the patchy progress that had been made across the different pillars of humanitarian reform, with most headway considered to have been made in the financing and co-ordination components. By comparison, far less progress was reported in the area of leadership.

“The UN has continued to appoint unqualified HCs who do not adequately understand humanitarian action; who underestimate the importance of NGOs; who do not understand the critical importance of partnership...There is a need to ensure that stronger, more effective leaders with humanitarian experience are appointed to the pivotal HC position.”⁵

These concerns have since been echoed by the ALNAP-authored document, *The State of the Humanitarian System*, which voiced considerable concern about the strength of leadership and co-ordination in emergency responses.

“Of all its challenges, international humanitarian action was seen to suffer most from lack of effective leadership and coordination, according to its constituents’ responses, which were consistent across regions and agency affiliations.”⁶

However, despite a slow start in strengthening the humanitarian leadership pillar, efforts have been made to address some of the more significant concerns. Progress has been made through the establishment of the HC pool and the HC selection and assessment panels, the revision of HC terms of reference, and the introduction of HC compacts to strengthen performance and management. An HC

Handbook has been elaborated, and considerable effort has been invested in training candidates for the HC pool as well as for Resident Coordinators (RC) who have an HC function.

In addition to strengthening recruitment and training practices, steps have been taken to identify and understand better the factors that hinder effective HC leadership and work conducted by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) HC Strengthening Team. Dividing these into three categories has been particularly helpful:

- Individual skills, competencies, and motivation
- Limitations in the management and support provided to HCs
- Institutional factors, including the breadth of the role that HCs are often required to play (particularly related to double-, triple- and quadruple-hatted HCs) and the associated need to balance conflicting agendas; and an HC’s lack of authority over Humanitarian Country Team members.

Identifying some of the key impediments to effectiveness represents important progress, which is necessary if solutions are to be identified. In the HC Strengthening Team there is also now a group of people mandated and able to offer strategic and operational support. However, it is important not to underestimate the scale of the task: making headway in strengthening leadership is a complex process, and success will depend on a range of factors. It is important to recognise that this is a shared task, and that the NGO community, as a significant humanitarian partner often with far greater resources than the UN, has an important role to play in supporting leadership – and in seeking to promote an enabling environment that supports effective leadership. This is the central theme of this research, and it will be explored further below.

2. Get the right ones in: The recruitment and deployment of humanitarian leaders

Despite the increasing professionalisation of the humanitarian sector over the last 15 years, and despite abundant literature on leadership theory, leadership failures in recent responses to humanitarian crises have caused growing concern. While Weiss⁷ points to a combination of “overwhelming bureaucracy and underwhelming leadership” as one of the main ills of the UN, concern about the lack of strong leadership is not focused on the UN alone: it speaks more broadly to what is considered to be a dearth of talented leadership across the sector.

4 NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project (2009) *Synthesis Report: Review of the Engagement of NGOs with the Humanitarian Reform Process*, Commissioned by the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project. The report analyses the current state of global humanitarian reform efforts from an NGO perspective by synthesising a series of mapping studies carried out between November 2008 and February 2009. These looked at humanitarian reform in five different countries: Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Zimbabwe.

5 NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project (2009) *Synthesis Report: Review of the Engagement of NGOs with the Humanitarian Reform Process*, commissioned by the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project.

6 Active Learning Network on Accountability and Performance (ALNAP) (2009) *The State of the Humanitarian System: Assessing Performance and progress – A Pilot Study*, Overseas Development Institute.

7 Hochschild F (2010) *In and Above Conflict: A Study on Leadership in the United Nations*, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.

“...the field of international disaster management/ humanitarian assistance remains one which is characterised often as pre-professional, uneven in management competency, inefficient, inequitable, and often at odds with long term recovery and development.”⁸

With the sector having grown considerably in recent years, and with the politicisation of aid requiring that it operates in ever-increasingly complex humanitarian environments, there has been a growing acknowledgement of the need to strengthen leadership. To address this, efforts are being made by training and research organisations to find ways to fill gaps, train leaders, and strengthen practice,⁹ and the re-focusing of attention on leadership has led to an emerging consensus about a combination of skills and competencies that humanitarian leaders require. These include planning for ambiguity, working across diffuse teams, and the need to navigate successfully around the bureaucracies of modern management techniques. A succinct description of how these can provide the basis for effective humanitarian leadership is given by the Humanitarian Futures Programme, whose report on leadership in 21st century humanitarian organisations¹⁰ considers that

“...Strategic leaders of the future need to position themselves at the node where different networks connect or where there is maximum overlap between the elements of a collaborative Venn diagram. They will need skills to build multi-sectoral collaborative networks based on a recognition of the changing realities of the humanitarian field and emerging actors, and also to enable others to learn from them... Future strategic leaders will have to move beyond their traditional comfort zones and embrace the ambiguity which reflects reality, and consequently will have to develop appropriate anticipatory and adaptive skills.”

In addition to suggesting important competencies in envisioning and collaboration, it also points to a need to focus attention on strengthening mutual accountabilities within the humanitarian system (an issue that is developed further in section 5.1). NHRP’s

Mapping Study in DRC is a good example of how an empowered humanitarian leader can work with others to provide effective leadership.

Box 1: Successful humanitarian leadership in DRC

“There is general agreement that the DRC has benefited substantially from a strong Humanitarian Coordinator who has made a real effort to push for humanitarian concerns and priorities within an integrated mission structure. The HC plays an active role in reform mechanisms...and commands respect from all the actors with whom he interacts. Observing the Pooled Fund Board meeting, it was clear that the HC was well acquainted with the details of the proposals presented and capable of asking agency representatives tough questions when necessary...The HC also takes a keen interest in ensuring that the cluster system works effectively and is willing to raise problems with cluster lead agencies to ensure that they are addressed. Therefore, it is clear that an HC’s strong and effective leadership can contribute to ensuring better functioning reform mechanisms.”¹¹

In establishing an explicit set of humanitarian coordination competencies that incorporate the Global Humanitarian Platform’s (GHP) Principles of Partnership (PoP)¹² and People in Aid’s Humanitarian Leadership Competencies, and that form the basis for HC selection, important progress has been made towards being able to identify people with the skills required to perform humanitarian leadership roles. While the establishment of a competency framework is an important first step to strengthening leadership, successful recruitment against this framework remains a crucial challenge, as does ensuring the timely deployment of leadership in disasters.

2.1 The need to place a high value on recruitment and selection: The HC pool in theory

Despite the need for strong leadership, recruitment and selection processes have historically been woefully inadequate for this important task. Important progress towards recruiting skilled humanitarian leaders who can often be deployed at short notice was made when OCHA was tasked to establish and manage an HC pool to provide “excellence in humanitarian leadership”¹³. However, it has suffered from being seen by some as too UN-centric, and has

8 Active Learning Network on Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), Humanitarian Futures Programme (HFP), Disaster Management Leadership Academy (DMLA) (2010a) *Humanitarian and Disaster Management Leadership: A Collaborative Research and Development Initiative*.

9 A joint initiative has been established between ALNAP, the Disaster Resilience Leadership Academy of Tulane University, the Humanitarian Futures Programme, and People In Aid, to systematically explore and improve leadership within the humanitarian sector. More on this joint initiative can be found at <http://www.alnap.org/initiatives/current/leadership.aspx>.

10 Humanitarian Futures Programme (HFP) (2009) *Strategic Leadership in 21st Century Humanitarian Organisations: A Preliminary Scoping Exercise, Stage One Analysis*, Humanitarian Futures Programme, Kings College, London.

11 Mowjee T (2009a) *NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Mapping Study: Democratic Republic of Congo Report*, Development Initiatives, Commissioned by the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project.

12 Endorsed by the Global Humanitarian Platform in July 2007 (www.globalhumanitarianplatform.org), the PoP comprises the five principles of equality, transparency, results-oriented approach, responsibility, and complementarity.

13 Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) (2008) *Humanitarian Coordinators Pool Mapping Exercise – Report for the IASC*, 31 October 2008.

still struggled to deliver leaders of a consistently high standard. While pool members have all been recruited against the HC competency framework, some doubt remains about the ability of some of them to work to the required standard.

Beyond the perception of many NGO staff of the difficulties of successfully competing for HC pool membership, there are also structural disincentives for would-be pool members. Interviews with UN agency staff highlight the uncertain career path for HCs, as the role may require that they adopt a robust relationship with senior colleagues, and deal with unpopular issues that may hamper career progression. There is also a perception that, while the UN espouses the importance of principles in its humanitarian work, when HCs address such issues robustly with member states, little is done to protect them from the inevitable fallout.¹⁴ These perceptions will need to be addressed if ambitious staff are to be encouraged to apply for HC pool membership.

The dearth of talented leaders in the sector is also a considerable barrier to NGO and UN agencies offering up much-needed candidates to the pool. Many organisations have invested considerable resources in staff development, and so are reticent to offer up such talent when this would reduce their own humanitarian response capacity. It is necessary for these attitudes to change for the pool to be given the best chance of success.

As important as it is to put candidates forward, it is equally important that senior NGO leaders participate in the IASC HC Assessment Panel (HCAP), the inter-agency body tasked to assess suitability, select HC pool members, and suggest potential matches to upcoming vacancies for HC and RC/HC positions. Interviews suggested that some agencies have already de-prioritised their involvement; but this is short-sighted. Given past concerns about the danger of deploying HCs without the right skills – and given the dearth of candidates in the pool who can compete for double- or triple-hatted humanitarian leadership roles – the best opportunity currently available to influence this is to put candidates forward for selection, or for NGOs to participate on the HCAP.

While the future success of the system will ultimately be in the hands of the newly-appointed ERC, as she alone has the power to enforce its use, humanitarian partners have an important opportunity to help it to make its mark. An NGO-UN partnership would provide the best possible foundation for the HC pool to succeed, and it would be a missed opportunity if agencies were to opt out before commitments about transparent decision-making processes and

partnership in HC selection and appointment processes could be implemented.

2.2 Not just the right skills, but at the right time: The HC pool in practice

While the HC pool undoubtedly strengthens the ability of the UN to have access to pre-screened humanitarian leaders, concerns remain over the limited number of successful deployments from the pool, the appointment process, and the lack of timely deployment of some HCs. The fact that NGO participation in the mechanism has felt laboured has also been a divisive issue, with many interviewees pointing to the small number of NGO-experienced candidates recruited to the HC pool, and the lack of a successful deployment from their number, as a significant failure. While there purportedly have been instances where deployments have been offered but not taken up, there is no doubt that a successful NGO-experienced HC deployment will provide an important opportunity to build bridges and to test the hypothesis that humanitarian coordination can be led by non-UN staff. Interviews with senior NGO staff add weight to the symbolic importance of success in this.¹⁵ There is an irony here. It is often said that NGO-experienced candidates have greater humanitarian experience; yet their inexperience of the UN system can make it difficult for them to compete for humanitarian leadership roles, as Kent¹⁶ explains:

“There was a degree of dismay that the system had not adequately found ways to provide the necessary knowledge about the UN system to otherwise highly qualified candidates. Even for those with UN backgrounds, it was felt that little systematic effort was made to expose potential HC candidates to the inner workings of other agencies.”

While a comprehensive training package is being developed to strengthen the humanitarian knowledge of pool members, this should be complemented by similar efforts to integrate HC pool members into the UN.

The process of HC selection and appointment to posts has also attracted considerable criticism. The IASC consultation process has historically worked more as a rubber-stamp, with the ERC generally asking for non-objections to Resident Coordinators being appointed as HCs. Steps have now been taken to revise the process, and an IASC HC Panel has been mandated to work alongside the ERC to select humanitarian

¹⁴ See Kent (2009) p.22 for a more detailed commentary on this issue.

¹⁵ Elisabeth Rasmussen, now Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council, was deployed to Uganda at the end of 2006, but returned home after less than two months in post after failing to be granted a visa by the authorities.

¹⁶ Kent R (2009) *Mapping the Models: The Roles and Rationale of the Humanitarian Coordinator*, Humanitarian Futures Programme, London.

leaders jointly.¹⁷ However, while the system has the potential to ensure a much more transparent decision-making process, its success will be dependent on the willingness of the ERC to use it, as she “retains the prerogative to select individuals who are not members of the pool”¹⁸ – a right that has often been exercised by ERCs in the past.

Concern has also been raised by IASC members about the practice of fast-tracking HC candidatures in order to respond to rapid-onset emergencies. It will be important that in future an appropriate balance is struck between getting the post filled swiftly and ensuring that post-holder has the right competencies and experience. While such decisions are often agreed on a ‘no objection’ basis, some NGO IASC participants are reluctant to be the only dissenting voice. A similar process has been adopted for moving sitting HCs (who have not been through the HC selection process) into the HC pool. This too is potentially divisive, and places both the HCs and potential objectors in a difficult position. Given the flaws with this type of decision-making process, a far more transparent way forward would be for all candidates, whether or not they have previous HC experience, to go through a full selection process. This recommendation has broad support.

The demand for senior humanitarian leaders from the pool, and complications with finding a suitable candidate, suggest that its current size of 33 members is too small. One of the emerging lessons is that finding a pool member who is senior enough, has sufficient experience, is available for deployment, and is willing to be deployed, can be a challenge. The experience of Haiti adds weight to the importance of timely decision-making about deploying humanitarian leaders.

“...there was a perception of a coordination deficit in the initial phase of the response operation, and a sense in which others (e.g. the military actors) felt they had to step in to supplement humanitarian leadership on the ground, which was not providing sufficient strategic vision or overall visible coherence. Critical strategic decisions impacting on the efficacy and appropriateness of the humanitarian response, including, for example, strategies to

deal with immediate assistance to, and longer-term resettlement of, those displaced, and a more strategic targeting of assistance to prevent significant population movements, seemed to be slow in coming.”¹⁹

The earthquake in Haiti precipitated one of the most visible crises of recent years. The findings of the IASC report suggest that significant work is still required to close the gap between strengthened humanitarian leadership in theory and practice. This is disappointing given that the Earthquake occurred a significant time after the roll out of the humanitarian reforms. While it will always be a tough challenge to deliver high quality humanitarian leaders on time, the ambitions of humanitarian reform and the demands of humanitarian response require it.

2.3 Beyond the HC pool: Influencing the appointment of RC/HCs

The preference for appointing ‘double-hatted’ HC/RCs is significantly more problematic than that of HC appointment, as the recruitment and selection processes are internal to the UN, and are considered by those outside the process to be extremely difficult to influence. Many consider it to be a failure of judgment that the UN often fails to prioritise humanitarian competencies in its appointments.

While HC pool members can be put forward by the HC panel to compete for double-hatted posts once the RC selection process starts, the IASC as a collective body effectively loses the opportunity to influence the selection process, as it is an internal UN process. The need for significant UN experience to compete for double-hatted posts immediately puts them beyond the reach of many HC pool members who come from an NGO background. But even for those who possess the requisite UN experience, the 12-month hiatus in the RC Assessment Centre (RCAC), which is a prerequisite for selection, has created a bottleneck in applications, which has delayed some HC pool members being put through the process.

For candidates who have successfully been through the RC assessment process, anecdotal evidence suggests that appointments are often based as much on internal bargaining and negotiation as they are on candidate competence and capacity. While the profile for RC/HC posts includes humanitarian experience and humanitarian coordination competencies²⁰, the successful candidate – whom the Inter-Agency Advisory Panel (IAAP) considers has the greatest ‘fit’²¹

17 As soon as the ERC decides to establish an HC function, the Deputy ERC should convene and chair an ad hoc meeting of the IASC HC Pool Panel via tele/videoconference to consult the IASC on the most suitable HC model, and wherever possible on a suitable candidate(s) for that model. The outcome of the meeting shall be a written recommendation to the ERC. If consensus cannot be reached, a note shall nonetheless be sent to the ERC detailing the different opinions and options, including possible candidates for different options as appropriate. The final decision on model and candidate rests with the ERC.

18 See Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) (2010a) *Consultative Mechanism on HC/DHC Designation and Related Issues*, IASC 76th Working Group Meeting, 7-9th April 2010.

19 Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) (2010c) *Response to the Humanitarian Crisis in Haiti: Achievements, Challenges and Lessons to be Learnt*.

20 See United Nations Development Group (UNDG) (2009) *Guidelines for the Selection and Appointment of Resident Coordinators*, November 2009, UN, New York.

21 The Inter Agency Advisory Panel is responsible for short-listing for RC posts and recommending them to the UNDG for endorsement. The Secretary General makes the final decision.

– all too often does not possess these competencies. The lack of experience of many HC pool members in the field of social development makes it difficult for them to compete for posts. The limited diversity of the pool²² likely adds to this challenge, as the RC recruitment process places significant emphasis on North-South balance and gender balance. However, it is the perceived lack of transparency in how these decisions are made that is problematic, and this does little to build confidence and foster acceptance, particularly given the frequency with which candidates are selected without humanitarian experience in settings that require it.

If humanitarian leadership is to be strengthened in a context where the double-hatted model of humanitarian leadership is preminent, there needs to be a far greater prioritisation of humanitarian experience in contexts that require it. While the successful progression of half the HC pool through the RCAC and the deployment of five pool members to double- or triple-hatted posts by March 2010 represent promising progress, there is still room for improvement. Recent humanitarian leadership failures have exposed the risks inherent in ignoring the importance of humanitarian experience. The impact that poor leadership has had on the ability of the humanitarian community to respond effectively in Haiti and other high-profile crises serves to underline the importance of making the right decision from the outset.

2.4 The importance of an enabling environment

In the context of humanitarian crises, which are often associated with partial or complete state collapse prompted by natural disaster or conflict, the concept of an enabling environment may seem an odd one. However, it is essential for successful humanitarian leadership, and it can be provided in some measure by actors involved in responding to a crisis and those tasked with leading the response.

At the level of the humanitarian community, much can be done to foster an atmosphere that is supportive of coordination and leadership. The willingness of actors to engage with HCs, to share information, and to strengthen the response of the humanitarian community, is an important contribution to this, and it should not be taken for granted. There is growing concern in some quarters about competition within the sector and about the prioritisation of individual agency mandates over the need for a coordinated response.²³ It is not unknown for senior agency staff to prioritise their own programmes over attendance at humanitarian leadership and coordination meetings.

At the level of the organisation, a study by the Humanitarian Futures Programme²⁴ suggests that three essential characteristics are required for effective humanitarian leadership: the prioritisation of planning despite the uncertain environment; a need to embrace ambiguity rather than fall back on more traditional linear cause and effect thinking; and the importance of fostering a dynamic planning environment that is sufficiently flexible to accommodate change and challenge.

Ironically, it may be these same organisational competencies that are being displaced in the humanitarian sector by the trend towards prioritising logic and planning. Continuing concern about the lack of innovation in the sector – and measures to address it – suggests that progress in professionalising the sector may have been achieved at the expense of the spirit of innovation and entrepreneurialism that once characterised it. These same skills are highly prized in the dynamically changing environments where humanitarian response is conducted. The challenge to humanitarian organisations is how to re-balance themselves to support efficient and accountable provision of assistance, while fostering an environment that allows for ambiguity and change.

3. Not 'them' but 'us': The need to strengthen humanitarian partnership

The disparate nature of the humanitarian community – which comprises a multitude of organisations with a dizzying array of mandates, competencies, and capacities – points to the fundamental importance that partnership underpin every aspect of humanitarian leadership. The OCHA paper on the 'unfinished agenda' of HC strengthening explains the importance of partnership for successful HC leadership.

"...the role that Coordinators play...is one of active facilitation and leadership from behind. This horizontal role (as opposed to a vertical, command-and-control role) is extremely delicate, insofar as it takes place in a context of non-hierarchical relationships where engagement in coordination arrangements is voluntary, and relies on intellectual leadership and persuasion rather than on formal authority. Such a role can be performed successfully only if each and every stakeholder – members of the UN Country Team (UNCT) and HCT, but also agency headquarters and donors at field and headquarters level – is committed to making it work."²⁵

22 In March 2010, the gender and geographical balance was described as 'unsatisfactory', with only four women (15% of the total) and nine individuals from non-OECD countries (33%) (IASC, 2010d).

23 See "Haiti Aid Agencies Accused of Jostling for Position" at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jan/22/haiti-aid-agencies-accused-jostling>

24 Humanitarian Futures Programme (HFP) (2009) *Strategic Leadership in 21st Century Humanitarian Organisations: A Preliminary Scoping Exercise, Stage One Analysis*, Humanitarian Futures Programme, Kings College, London.

25 Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (2009b) *Strengthening the HC System: The Unfinished Agenda*, paper presented to the IASC Working Group in March 2009.

While the balancing act required to lead a diverse set of humanitarian partners is a complex one, the *Principles of Partnership* provide a template for success. Implicit in them is the belief that effective partnerships are not just about mechanistic relationships, in which actors come together to achieve a set of common objectives, dividing up responsibilities and planning joint work; rather they require attention to underlying issues of power, attitudes, and styles of working. This suggests that the softer networking, facilitation and listening skills of HCs are of key importance. Interviews with humanitarian staff bear this out: the majority of participants asserted that effective communication and transparency were among the most important leadership attributes, and that they were a foundation for strong partnerships built on trust.

Despite some progress having been made towards fostering partnerships within the humanitarian community, this remains a key challenge. The research interviews highlighted a continuing lack of trust between different members that was felt to hamper closer ways of working. Toby Lanzer's article in *Forced Migration Review*, written when he was the HC in Central African Republic (CAR), speaks of "competition" (as opposed to partnership) as a "recurring obstacle".²⁶

"Regular and well-organised interaction between the key organisations working in the same areas of humanitarian response is possible provided we can address recurring obstacles – competition, egos and poorly-run meetings."²⁷

Writing on transformational leadership and organisational change, the Disaster Resilience Learning Academy correctly identifies negative factors of "cultural differences [between humanitarian partners], competition over limited resources, and narrowly focused career ascendency", which they consider can create an environment in which "self-protectiveness, self-promotion, and independence" can inhibit coordination and communication.²⁸

Strategic leadership theory strongly emphasises the importance of communication, networking, and diversity, which should underpin humanitarian coordination forums such as the HCT and cluster meetings. However, the failure to value these attributes adequately, to commit meaningfully to coordination, or to use the opportunity for HCTs to drive humanitarian strategy, are proving to be a barrier to success. An important question for the humanitarian community is whether there is sufficient

will to build a partnership that transcends agency mandates and rivalries, and that provides a foundation for effective leadership.

3.1 A vision of the future: HCT as strategic humanitarian leadership team

The IASC Guidance Note refers to the HCT as the 'centre-piece' of the humanitarian coordination architecture of humanitarian reform, and describes its responsibilities as including (1) agreeing on common strategic issues related to humanitarian action in-country; (2) agreeing on common policies related to humanitarian action in-country; and (3) promoting adherence by organisations undertaking humanitarian action in-country to humanitarian principles, the principles of partnership, the IASC guidelines, and policies and strategies adopted by the HCT.²⁹ This type of forum is embodied in Lanzer's article on humanitarian co-ordination in the CAR.

"In CAR, we have established a common forum for discussing the political and security context, assessing people's needs, elaborating sector priorities and defining a strategy to meet them. The forum, which we call the Humanitarian and Development Partnership Team (HDPT), is informal and based on equality and mutual respect."³⁰

Interviews suggest, however, that progress remains patchy, that ambitions to use the HCT as a strategic forum remain unmet, and that in many emergencies the HCTs are best characterised by the absence of strategic leadership and intent rather than its presence. Even though the Humanitarian Reform Tracking Tool identified 13 out of 16 countries where a 'broad-based HCT' had been formed by October 2008, interviews with HCT members highlighted poor progress towards meeting the full aspirations outlined in the HCT Guidance Note. On too many occasions, HCTs were described as being more focused at the level of information sharing, or were considered too fractious to be effective. Furthermore, discussions with senior humanitarian staff showed that expectations of HCTs were often low; and in the absence of a strong accountability structure, participants felt powerless to effect change. The NHRP's research in Zimbabwe is testament to this.

26 At the time the article was written, Toby Lanzer was HC for Central African Republic. He is currently Chief of Staff in the UN Mission in Timor Leste.

27 Lanzer T (2007) Humanitarian Reform: A View from CAR. *Forced Migration Review*, 29 (December), Refugee Studies Centre.

28 Disaster Resilience leadership Academy (DRLA) (2010) *Transformational Leadership and Organisational Change*, Report on research themes.

29 Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) (2010b) *Guidance for Humanitarian Country Teams*, endorsed by the 75th IASC Working Group on 18th November 2009.

30 Lanzer T (2007) Humanitarian Reform: A View from CAR. *Forced Migration Review*, 29 (December), Refugee Studies Centre.

Box 2: Slow progress made towards realising the ambitions for the HCT in Zimbabwe

“The survey revealed that the HCT has an agreed TOR that was drafted in accordance with the IASC guidelines on HCTs and approved in March 2010 but highlighted the absence of a work plan or a mechanism to review its performance. Some respondents felt that the HCT has been reduced to an information-sharing forum and has not met its strategic ambitions. Several respondents observed that the HCT lacks responsiveness towards humanitarian advocacy issues with both the government and donors. Accountability to crisis-affected populations hasn’t been integrated into the HCT’s work and there are no mechanisms in place to raise awareness of its existence with humanitarian claimants or to elicit feedback from them. Accountability to affected people is considered to be more relevant to clusters or individual agencies.”³¹

Of even greater concern is that it tends to be in the more complex politicised environments – where the need for strategic leadership and strong coordination between organisations is greatest – that progress towards a coherent humanitarian partnership in the HCT has been most difficult to establish. Interviews with humanitarian staff in both Somalia and Afghanistan highlighted deep divisions and a failure to build strong strategic partnerships. While it is in these situations that it is hardest to achieve success, it is also the case that a failure to bring the humanitarian community together risks seriously damaging the fragile construct of humanitarianism, as Michael Young’s commentary from Pakistan in *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine*³² suggests:

“...the Humanitarian Country Team, although representative of the wider community, has been unable to play an effective strategic role and remains focused on issues of process and operational detail. This focus on micro management has further undermined its ability to act as an effective advocate for humanitarian principles.”

If busy humanitarian staff (whether from NGOs, UN agencies, or national NGOs) are to be convinced of the importance of investing valuable time in attending meetings, there has to be an acknowledgement of the strategic role that the HCT needs to play, and of the value of its embodying the *Principles of Partnership*. In politicised humanitarian environments, where the

community can easily become polarised, there is an even stronger case for ensuring that it has strategic reach.

3.2 The importance of agency commitment to participation in leadership forums

Interviews at all levels of the humanitarian community raised concern about the commitment and ability of agencies to dedicate the time and resources required to deliver against their coordination commitments. While some agencies were more self-critical than others, there was a general acceptance that, on the one hand, NGOs and UN agencies demanded a seat at the coordination table, but, on the other hand, they did not (or could not) always appropriately resource this.

“If humanitarian agencies are to be accepted as equals, they need to act as equals and take on leadership positions at country and cluster-level. NGOs complain that they are not treated as equals but they are often passive in seeking to address this.” (Humanitarian director)

Some of the bad habits that weaken the leadership potential of the HCT include delegating participation to junior members, prioritising agency positions over the wider needs of the group, and forming membership blocs that vote together. This is divisive, and in some HCTs it pits the UN agencies against their NGO cousins, which can create an extremely toxic environment that undermines any possibility of meaningful partnership.

The research found evidence of an uneasy relationship in some instances between UN agencies and HCTs, where there was a perception that a power struggle between powerful heads of UN agencies and the HC (/RC) was stymieing the ability of the HCT to work strategically, and destroying what little trust remained between humanitarian partners. This speaks to a broader issue of “internal disjointedness” that Kent raises in his paper on models of UN humanitarian leadership:

“A persistent frustration for virtually all practicing RCs and HCs that were interviewed for this exercise was the lack of authority that affected their ability to perform their functions effectively [which] is regarded as one of the greatest disincentives facing UN coordinators in general. The sense of grievance seems considerable. Faced with a wide range of responsibilities, many of which are ultimately concerned with saving lives, coordinators rail at the fact that expectations about substantive results depends in the final analysis on their ability to cajole and persuade.”³³

31 Survey of HCT members conducted in July 2010; collated by Mudasser Siddiqui, Humanitarian Reform Officer for NHRP in Zimbabwe.

32 Young M (2010) The Uses of Adversity: Humanitarian Principles and Reform in the Pakistan Displacement Crisis, *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine*, Issue 46, March 2010, Humanitarian Practice Network, ODI.

33 Kent R (2009), *Mapping the Models: The Roles and Rationale of the Humanitarian Coordinator*, Humanitarian Futures Programme, London (internet).

HCT members can also thwart the ambitions of HCs through their inaction or non-participation. While resource constraints (both human and financial) are often blamed, the logic of prioritising programmes over participation in both HCT and clusters is faulty. It will only be through committing to coordination and leadership as an equal partner that humanitarian stakeholders will be treated as such. Donors play a key role in understanding that coordination commitments are a part of doing humanitarian business, and they should ensure that their funding priorities reflect this. Where there is bad behaviour in HCTs, it needs to be challenged. Success in fostering a productive and collegiate working environment within the HCT should be considered a key performance indicator for all of its members.

3.3 Stretching the traditional boundaries of HCT membership

Humanitarian leadership has long been the domain of the international community, represented by UN agencies and international NGOs. While an important emphasis has been placed on ensuring the engagement of national NGOs in cluster coordination, less attention has focused on the importance of national NGO participation in HCTs.

The research found only modest success in seeking to broaden HCT membership to include national participation. Interviews suggested that national NGOs often place a comparatively low value on attendance. The potential value of having national representation in coordination forums has received considerable attention in numerous cluster evaluations, and the same value needs to be placed on national NGO participation in HCTs. In complex politicised humanitarian environments, concerns have been raised about the potential for national participation to add to an already complicated set of relationships; but there is an important need for such judgments to be based on practice rather than theory.

While important partners are often omitted from HCTs, there has been an increasing trend for representatives from donor agencies to be members of the group. The research suggests that there have been mixed motives for this. On the one hand, there is doubtless potential for donors to support and strengthen the voice of HCT, which is welcome. However, in some countries donor participation was found to be a means of policing agency commitment to the HCT. It also has the potential to restrict the voice of HCT participants; some participants in the research raised a concern that the funding relationship between humanitarian agencies and donors meant that discussion or disclosure about aid failures or complexities risked being blocked. Others pointed to the overtly 'political' role that many donors play, which meant that other HCT members were less inclined to speak out about sensitive issues. A growing move

towards coherence in donors' agendas certainly risks complicating relationships within HCTs.

Without doubt, the most important humanitarian partner is the national government. It is also the primary duty bearer, and as such should play a central role in leading and coordinating humanitarian response. Where the humanitarian community enjoys good relations and coordinates well with the government, efforts to forge strong links with humanitarian coordination forums have been successful. However, where this relationship is weak, there is a risk that parallel structures may be established (as in Ethiopia) or that humanitarian activity exists in a policy vacuum (as in Haiti). Neither model provides a strong foundation for providing assistance. The lack of optimism within the humanitarian community about the ability of an HC to resolve political interference successfully³⁴ underlines the importance of government engagement and inclusion from the outset, and the need for transparent communication with humanitarian partners when positive outcomes cannot be reached.

4. Trouble at the top: The need to strengthen management and support

The success or otherwise of humanitarian leadership is an issue of fierce debate and conflicting opinions. Each new crisis throws up its particular cocktail of complexities related to the political and humanitarian environment, and is subject to a vast array of humanitarian actors – governmental, non-governmental, local, and international – each with its own competencies, capacities, and strongly-held views over humanitarian priorities. It is these organisations that an HC is mandated to lead, and it is important to acknowledge the complexity of the task from the outset. A complex task requires strong support and responsive management; but there are considerable gaps in these crucial areas.

4.1 Making sense of HC management

There are currently 30 HCs, and on average 30 RCs perform humanitarian functions every year. In addition, all of the other 75 RCs have humanitarian responsibilities vis-à-vis preparedness, and all of them have a line of accountability up to the ERC.³⁵ In the last year, steps have been taken to revise the generic ToR for the HC and to establish compacts between each of the HCs and the ERC. While the ToR has helped to bring important clarification to the role, and the compacts have begun to be used more consistently, progress reports from the HC Strengthening Team

³⁴ In the online survey over two-thirds of respondents considered it extremely difficult or impossible for the HC to successfully deal with political interference from government.

³⁵ Messina C (HC Strengthening Team), 2010, pers. comm. 17 September.

note that these have not yet been embedded in a “continuous performance management system”, and so are not yet able to manage under-performance. That these issues have been identified and reported represents important progress. However, only when they have been resolved will the accountability deficit have been addressed. Recent feedback from the IASC review of achievements and challenges in Haiti doubtless adds weight to the urgent need for action.

“The initial coordination and leadership challenges...emphasize the need to reinforce endorsed systems and structures and to make sure individuals who are required to lead are provided with the means to do so.”³⁶

Interviews found broad consensus that the established HC management line to the ERC is too distant and is unworkable; neither is it aligned with that of RCs, which is now decentralised and pivots around Regional Directors’ Teams (RDT).³⁷ Such misalignment is problematic while there is considerable overlap between the two functions: all RCs have humanitarian responsibilities for preparedness, a growing number of RCs perform humanitarian functions, and most HCs are also RCs. While making changes to the reporting line will doubtless be complex, there is a growing recognition that action does need to be taken to strengthen the management of humanitarian leaders. One way to address this would be to bring the management of the HC in line with that of the RC: the post would be managed regionally, with the active participation of the OCHA Regional Head of Office in this team having more formal responsibility for providing management support. This would potentially offer greater management support, while also ensuring that the RDT benefited from greater humanitarian capacity. While current levels of seniority and established reporting lines will likely complicate successful change³⁸, given the increase in the number of RC/HC posts and the fact that there are a growing number of RCs who perform humanitarian functions, there would be significant benefits in harmonising reporting lines.

A second management weakness is the inability of other senior members of the humanitarian community to influence the performance management of HCs, even when there is a broad consensus that they are failing to have the impact required of the post. This is a highly divisive issue. While there is truth in the assertion that judgments

may often be based on “idiosyncratic and largely subjective benchmarks, differing from one stakeholder to the other”³⁹, that the process is closed to external input, and that the mechanism to provide management support to HCs and to performance manage them is manifestly weak, this does not offer an easy path to resolving the issue. The concept paper on HC-ERC compacts provides a potential blueprint to achieve success, but the research suggests a significant gap between theory and practice. Compacts need to describe HC objectives better, and provide more detailed and more measurable outputs that benefit from regular review; these should form part of a continuous performance management system which includes remedial action in cases of under-performance. For many humanitarian organisations, performance management systems such as this have been in place for many years; and it is a glaring omission that they have not yet been fully rolled out at the most senior level of the humanitarian system.

Irrespective of the approach taken to resolve weaknesses in the performance management of HCs and provision of support to them, an important recommendation of this paper is that change is urgently needed. Consistently effective leadership in humanitarian crises requires significantly enhanced management and support, and many working in the system believe that the challenges of the current setup do not provide the conditions necessary to deliver this.

4.2 The need for consistent and predictable support from OCHA

Field-level support for an HC or RC is entirely dependent on the capacity of the OCHA field office to provide it. However, recent evaluations of humanitarian response – and interviews linked to this research – suggest that support is very often too little, too late. Capacity to lead humanitarian coordination and support the HC regularly arrives some time after a crisis, with the result that the humanitarian leader often fails to receive the required support.

“Providing Coordinators with swift support in case of major sudden-onset emergencies or rapid deterioration of an existing situation has at times proved problematic, as OCHA has not always been able to mobilize swiftly the required quantity and quality of staff, especially following the first wave of surge capacity.”⁴⁰

Interviews highlighted a level of dissatisfaction with OCHA’s ability to provide a comprehensive service to support humanitarian leadership even in chronic

36 Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) (2010c) *Response to the Humanitarian Crisis in Haiti: Achievements, Challenges and Lessons to be Learnt*.

37 These teams include the Regional Directors of the operational agencies of the UN system.

38 Currently OCHA engages with the RDTs through the OCHA Head of Regional Office (whose grade is lower than that of RCs and of Regional Directors, and who does not have management responsibilities vis-à-vis RCs).

39 Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (2009d) *Strengthening the HC System: The Unfinished Agenda*, paper presented to the IASC Working Group in March 2009.

40 *Strengthening Humanitarian Coordination and Leadership: A Progress Report*, OCHA April 2010.

crises, despite broad praise for the added value it can have. The research highlighted the important role that it can play in situations where it arrives in good time and benefits from sufficient capacity, allowing the HC to perform and to meet his or her responsibilities fully. Where there is an RC/HC, pressures on time are even greater, making the success of humanitarian leadership even more contingent on OCHA's assistance. In such situations, UNDP also has an important role to play in de-linking the RC role from that of the UNDP Country Director, significantly reducing the RC/HC's workload and giving the incumbent the best possible chance of success.

The importance attached to effective humanitarian leadership points to an urgent need for OCHA to provide a more consistent and predictable package of services to HCs and RCs, including the use of standby rosters for coordination support teams and specialised advisors (particularly in areas of advocacy and protection, which are often the skills most difficult to recruit) who can be deployed at short notice. It is essential that HCs and the broader humanitarian community be assured of a minimum level of support in coordination. It is also essential that OCHA addresses gaps in the quality and quantity of support. Ultimately, if humanitarian leaders are to be effective in responding to crises, the ability of OCHA to deploy timely and effective support is critically important.

4.3 Strength in numbers: The Deputy HC

Reviews of recent emergency responses have also emphasised the important support that can be received through the deployment of Deputy Humanitarian Coordinators (DHCs). Such posts currently exist in several large emergencies, including Sudan, Chad, Niger, and Haiti, and they can provide important capacity for supporting an HC's leadership in large crises.

"In a context such as Haiti, it is clear that these [leadership] functions cannot be effectively discharged by one person alone, particularly if that person also maintains responsibilities within an integrated UN mission (in this case MINUSTAH). Various strategies to support the HC must be considered, which might include the swift appointment of a Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator, the delegation of the incumbent's other responsibilities to an alternative person, or the appointment of a separate HC as the situation requires. The overriding requirement is to support the HC function."⁴¹

Historically the DHC post has attracted controversy due to potential overlaps with OCHA's role. On occasions it has been used to make up for a perceived lack of humanitarian skills in the HC or HC/RC. In such circumstances the post risks becoming marginalised; but where both the HC and DHC have relevant humanitarian competencies, the post benefits from a clear ToR that clarifies decision-making responsibilities and ways of working with OCHA. And where there are large or complex crises, it can make a considerable contribution to humanitarian leadership.

Because DHCs are often deployed closer to disaster areas, they also have much to offer through their potential linkages with humanitarian field teams and affected populations. Given the accountability gaps identified earlier in this report, the post's potential to provide leadership on issues of accountability to disaster victims is too good an opportunity to miss.

Through the deployment of DHCs there is also an opportunity to start to build the skills gap that has been identified in the HC pool, particularly in the NGO-experienced candidates who often have significant humanitarian experience but who may lack knowledge of the UN system. By deploying HC pool candidates as DHCs, capacity can be built within the team while also providing much-needed support to humanitarian leadership.

5. Identifying the missing links in the humanitarian accountability chain

Given the importance attached to accountability in the rhetoric of humanitarian reform, it is curious that, beyond the provider of last resort, greater attention has not been given to the accountability architecture of the HC (or RC/HC) and HCT. Leadership cannot function in an accountability vacuum. This is one of the more significant challenges to the system of UN humanitarian leaders. Time and again, problems raised in interviews that were associated with leadership can be mapped back to the weak accountability framework. In a system characterised by non-hierarchical relationships between partners, and strong competitive incentives for each of the partners, there should be little surprise that an accountability system based solely on hierarchical, vertical lines does not work. While finding workable solutions to fix the manifest gaps in the accountability chain will be complex, and will require that individual agency power is ceded for the greater good of the humanitarian community, there is little doubt that success in this will allow significant progress to be made in strengthening humanitarian leadership.

41 Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) (2010c) *Response to the Humanitarian Crisis in Haiti: Achievements, Challenges and Lessons to be Learnt*.

5.1 System-wide accountability

There is an important accountability deficit at the system-level, with no single person or collective entity accountable for achieving humanitarian goals. The RC or HC leads and chairs the HCT, but does not have formal authority over it; and while they are accountable for the process of leading and coordinating humanitarian action, they cannot be held accountable for the results, as they have no authority over the agencies responsible for service delivery. This is further complicated when the HCT is taken into account: its members who are usually senior UN agency or NGO staff are accountable to their Regional Director or Head Office for the delivery of results in the sector or geographic area where they work. However, they are rarely held accountable for process (such as participation in HCT or clusters) unless they have specific cluster leadership responsibility. Furthermore, while the ToR for the HCT speaks to their accountability for both processes and results, it is unclear who should hold them accountable – and so no one does. If the HCT is expected to play a strategic leadership role, then a holistic approach to the accountability of its members needs to be adopted.

Experience from the Cluster 2 Evaluation⁴² suggests that mutual accountability can form the foundation for a successful team. A first step to achieving this would be for all HCT members to formalise their responsibilities in their respective ToRs. This would allow them to be held accountable within their own organisation for their performance in the team. It might also help ensure that members prioritise HCT attendance and duties. Currently it is no surprise that, when time is short, members put their agency before their HCT responsibilities. Re-working ToRs may ensure that busy country managers ring-fence time for HCT business. Mutual accountabilities can also be reinforced through the use of formalised work plans that link to the Common Humanitarian Action Plan (CHAP). Strengthening mutual accountabilities could also establish more formal feedback loops between members of the HCT and the HC. The important issue here is the need to ensure that feedback can go in both directions: from HCT members to the HC for the delivery of his/her compact, but also from the HC to the HCT members for their engagement in and delivery of tasks associated with the HCT work plan. Joint objective-setting between HCT members (including the HC) would be the ultimate goal, as it would allow the team the greatest possible opportunity of working towards common objectives.

However, mutual accountability can only go so far; and it will only be through strengthening collective

accountability for humanitarian action that it will be possible to make a step change in the strength of humanitarian response. On this issue the results of the online survey are encouraging, with almost 90% of respondents agreeing that leadership and coordination would benefit if humanitarian organisations gave greater priority to broad humanitarian response objectives over individual agency interests. The challenge this presents to the humanitarian community is how to move from rhetoric to reality. While discussions on the issue remain in their infancy, with the establishment of regional IASC teams, and with a growing number of international NGOs having set up regional management structures, there is the potential to trial innovative ways to strengthen team accountability to a regional management mechanism.

One such solution to filling the accountability gap is being pioneered in South Africa. The HCT is held accountable by a Regional Humanitarian Team, composed of Regional Directors of relevant humanitarian agencies. This approach builds on agencies' existing accountability lines, as many UN and non-UN agencies have a Regional Director position with line management responsibility for Country Representatives. It also dovetails with the accountability system for RCs and UN Country Teams, which centres on UN Regional Directors' Teams (RDT).⁴³

A central message of the research is that in order to be effective, humanitarian leadership will require considerably strengthened teamwork and transparency, and that if the community is to work beyond its constituent parts, change will be necessary. The key challenge here is whether members of the humanitarian community are willing to stretch their accountabilities and cede power to the broader humanitarian system at a time when the sector is considered by some to be becoming ever more competitive, and when demands on the time of senior humanitarian staff are becoming ever greater.

5.2 Accountability to crisis-affected communities

In addition to reviewing vertical and mutual accountabilities, there remains a considerable deficit in accountability to people affected by crisis, and who are in need of (or are receiving) aid. Evaluations regularly refer to the failure of the humanitarian community to place sufficient emphasis on this line of accountability; and yet it seems difficult to make headway. It is noteworthy that the HC ToR makes reference to the importance of this line of accountability, and that the IASC Guidance Note for HCTs goes further, suggesting the need for the group to establish mechanisms to achieve this.

42 Streets J et al (2010) *Cluster Approach Evaluation 2: Synthesis Report*, Urgence Rehabilitation Development and Global Public Policy Institute.

43 It's important to note that the transition of reporting lines is a work in progress that is gradually becoming a reality.

“The HC is ultimately accountable to the populations in need.”⁴⁴

“The HCT is ultimately accountable to the populations in need. Appropriate and meaningful mechanisms should be designed and implemented at the local level to achieve this goal.”⁴⁵

Interviews with HCs and HCT members drew mixed reactions to these responsibilities. Some asserted that it was not possible to deliver this at such a high level; others considered it a central priority, and bemoaned the inability of humanitarian reform mechanisms to prioritise such an important aspect of their work. In its report on UN leadership, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue provides an apt description of the contradiction.

“While mandates frequently refer to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, these beneficiaries of the UN seldom play a significant role in evaluating UN performance. While they are sometimes referred to as ‘clients’ or ‘stakeholder populations’, there is no systematic and rigorous attempt as there is with clients in the private sector to collect and analyse their views and adjust programmes accordingly.”⁴⁶

The responses received to the online survey indicate the low expectations that humanitarian staff have of HC success in resolving the deficit, and testify to the limited progress that agencies themselves have made in consistently delivering against this line of accountability.⁴⁷ While steps have been taken to plug this most glaring of gaps in some organisations, collective progress across the humanitarian community can be described as patchy at best. The research suggests that there is little question about whether beneficiary accountability is important; what appears to be more difficult is to conceive appropriate mechanisms to engage meaningfully.

It is a recommendation of this paper that the status quo is untenable, and that there is an urgent need for practical ways to be identified to perform this accountability function. HCs and HCTs can little afford

to work in the absence of feedback from the people they are seeking to assist; cluster evaluations have made clear the importance of making headway in this, and a growing number of organisations across the humanitarian sector have made a commitment to this by signing up to Codes of Conduct and minimum standards, or through a formal commitment to accreditation by the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP).

The sector has generated many good practice case studies into how the views of affected people can be captured, and how feedback can be elicited and meaningfully inform decision-making about humanitarian response.⁴⁸ The key decision lies with HCs and HCT members: they will need to agree that such feedback is important for supporting their leadership function. The research findings strongly suggest that failure to elicit and incorporate the views of affected people would be a grave error.

6. Humanitarian principles and pragmatism in a complex world

6.1 It's not all about the hat

The breadth of the humanitarian leadership role has been an issue that has historically divided the humanitarian community, with the number of ‘hats’ the post-holder wears being the contentious issue. The online survey suggested that there is still considerable unease about merging the HC and RC roles⁴⁹; and this concern is also elaborated in Save the Children UK's recently published report on humanitarianism.

“The RC is obliged to maintain good relations with a host government, while the HC must press for an effective humanitarian response based on need, even in the face of government disapproval, particularly around humanitarian access or food security. This presents an RC/HC with a potential conflict of interest. In contexts where host governments are attempting to exercise greater control over humanitarian response,... this split mandate impairs the ability of an HC (the most senior humanitarian in a country) to stand up for humanitarian independence.”⁵⁰

The issue continues to raise considerable concern in complex and politicised humanitarian environments, due to the perceived dilution of humanitarian principles and the potential for de-prioritisation of the

44 Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) (2009c) *Revised Terms of Reference for the Humanitarian Coordinator*, Humanitarian Coordination Working Group.

45 Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) (2010b) *Guidance for Humanitarian Country Teams*, endorsed by the 75th IASC Working Group on 18th November 2009.

46 Hochschild F (2010) *In and Above Conflict: A Study on Leadership in the United Nations*, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.

47 51.4% of respondents considered that HCs had failed to deliver against this aspect of their ToR, compared with 12.3% who considered that HCs had been successful. Agencies scored their own efforts higher, with 41.1% of respondents considering that some success had been achieved, against 19.7% who considered their agencies' efforts unsuccessful. These percentages were considerably less than those in other areas, including participation in coordination forums, defending humanitarian principles, and working in partnership.

48 See, for example, Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR) (2010) *SCHR Peer Review on Accountability to Disaster-Affected Populations: An Overview of Lessons Learnt*, Geneva, Switzerland.

49 The separation of RC and HC roles received the second highest number of responses to the question, “What do you consider to be the most important action that could be taken to strengthen UN humanitarian leadership?”

50 Save the Children UK (2010) *At a Crossroads: Humanitarianism for the Next Decade*, International Save the Children.

humanitarian mandate. But there is also a growing acceptance by some that, in certain circumstances, the political role of an RC – if used appropriately – can strengthen humanitarian action rather than weaken it. The decision to open up the HC appointment process to greater IASC participation provides far greater opportunity for constructive engagement by humanitarian stakeholders on the issue of humanitarian leadership. This is encouraging; but fears will only begin to be assuaged if recruitment practices are changed to ensure that those tasked with humanitarian leadership responsibilities (irrespective of the number of hats worn) are recruited with the required skill-set, and are provided with adequate support to deliver them successfully.

6.2 Collective commitment or coexistence?

The humanitarian advocacy component of an HC's ToR emphasises the importance of “free, timely, safe and unimpeded access by humanitarian organisations to populations in need”, and underlines the important role of promoting “respect of international humanitarian and human rights law by all parties”. This is one of the most complicated aspects of humanitarian leadership, and it has the capacity to polarize the humanitarian community.

“The humanitarian enterprise is itself divided on the extent to which core principles should be respected, particularly in the more asymmetrical and intractable crises they have to confront. This disquiet affects the quality and coherence of the assistance and protection provided.”⁵¹

While the number of hats an HC wears may impact on his or her ability or willingness to defend humanitarian principles robustly, the various members of the humanitarian community often do little to help themselves. In some of the most complex humanitarian environments, where there is the greatest humanitarian need, the lack of a collective understanding of and approach to promoting and defending principles is one of the most significant challenges facing humanitarianism.

“...there is concern in some quarters that, recently, the judgement of mixed-mandate agencies has put principled humanitarianism at risk. By accepting funding from warring parties – principally NATO countries – NGOs are in a position in which it is difficult to argue they are fully impartial, neutral or independent.”⁵²

While it would be naïve to suggest that country-level negotiations can paper over the cracks that run deep within the humanitarian community, a collective response to the challenges being faced is possible, and the HC has a responsibility to help broker it. A recent study on the response to the IDP crisis in the Swat valley of Pakistan sees this as significant and important:

“...at a country level there is a need for humanitarian coordination mechanisms to offer greater leadership and guidance in upholding, promoting and defending the principles when they are under threat. The HC and HCT have an essential role to play in this.”⁵³

Not surprisingly, the online survey that accompanied this research found that respondents considered promoting and defending humanitarian space to be the area where a HC can have most impact. But it was also considered to be one of the areas in which humanitarian leaders had had the least success⁵⁴ – a view that is given weight by the findings of the NHRP Mapping Study in Ethiopia and Afghanistan.

Box 3: The challenges of influencing stakeholders on issues of principle in Ethiopia and Afghanistan

“Leadership proved to be an important issue in Ethiopia mainly because of concerns about...access and upholding humanitarian principles in the Somali region. INGOs regard the UN as too reliant on government to operate in Ethiopia to be effective in raising these concerns...The HC acknowledged the problem and is aware of the INGO perception but feels that he has been as frank with the government about these difficult issues as he can.”⁵⁵

“The perception of alignment of the UN with the government [of Afghanistan] and the Coalition is of course problematical for those parts of the aid community striving to work in a more principled way. NGOs are not immune from the same criticism as many work with government, and some even with the Provincial Reconstruction Teams, while at the same time claiming they can work according to principle. Operating with multiple mandates is also problematic when it comes to advocacy and solidarity activities. While advocacy for humanitarian principles and the respect of international

51 Donino A, Fast K, Hansen G, Harris S, Minear L, Mowjee T, Wilder A (2008) *Humanitarian Agenda 2015: Final Report, The State of the Humanitarian Enterprise*, Feinstein International Center.

52 Dempsey, B and Kyazze, Amelia B *At a Crossroads: Humanitarianism for the Next Decade*, Save the Children UK, 2010. It is important to mention that, because of this potential difficulty, Save the Children as a mixed mandate NGO, proposes that NGOs establish mechanisms to identify potential threats to humanitarian principles, and enable decision-making based on them.

53 Abouzeid A and Featherstone A (2010) *It's the Thought that Counts: Humanitarian Principles and Practice in Pakistan*, ActionAid International.

54 63.9% of respondents considered it as the area where the HC can have most impact on the effectiveness of humanitarian operations; however only 1.7% of respondents considered it an area in which the HC had achieved significant success (20.7% considered modest success had been achieved).

55 Mowjee T (2009b) *NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Mapping Study: Ethiopia Report*, Development Initiatives, Commissioned by the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project.

humanitarian law by all sides of the conflict is not an issue as long as it is non-partisan, the advocacy activities of some INGOs on development, justice and human rights issues, or statements on security issues such as the 'surge', run the risk of being seen as overly political by belligerents."⁵⁶

These examples highlight the problems that the HC faced in building consensus on the application of humanitarian principles. Interviews with HCT members in Somalia and Afghanistan suggest that the 'coherence' agenda advocated by many UN integrated missions is proving highly divisive, and is placing some parts of the UN in an adversarial relationship with NGOs. Even in the absence of such missions, in heavily politicised contexts such as Pakistan, the perceived prioritisation of stabilisation agendas over principled humanitarianism was considered to be a significant stumbling block. Responses to the online survey echo this concern, with a significant proportion of the respondents considering the task of reaching consensus on humanitarian principles to be extremely difficult or beyond the power of an HC to achieve. This suggests there may be a need to moderate expectations of what can be achieved, and to focus on developing bottom lines in areas where there are common goals (such as humanitarian access). Rather than aiming for consensus, energies might be best directed towards understanding the different positions of the various members of the humanitarian community, and on seeking to facilitate coexistence. Success in this will require a level of transparency between agencies, by HCs, and within HCTs that is rarely found at present; but it will be important to achieve this if challenges to humanitarian space are to be addressed.

The frustrations experienced in trying to resolve difficulties at a country level underline the importance of seeking to make progress at the level of the humanitarian system. There is a degree of urgency that headway is made through some of the recently-established initiatives, such as the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) Principles of Humanitarian Action in Practice project⁵⁷, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) initiative on strengthening the relevance of humanitarian principles, and the IASC's working group on humanitarian space.

7. Conclusion: Towards a shared responsibility for 21st century humanitarian leadership

If humanitarian leadership is to be significantly strengthened at a time when global need is increasing and humanitarian resources are becoming increasingly stretched, then the commitments set by the humanitarian reform agenda to predictability and accountability in providing assistance need to be fully realised. With its potential to influence all the other pillars, and to have the greatest impact on the overall goals of humanitarian reform, strengthening humanitarian leadership is without doubt the biggest priority. Rather than seeing it as a job for the UN alone, this report has highlighted important steps that need to be taken across the humanitarian community to strengthen partnership, increase accountability, and improve the performance of the humanitarian system as a whole. In setting out a challenging agenda for 21st century humanitarian leadership, it is recognised that there are no easy fixes, and that there will be implications for staff time and agency resources. But it is strongly believed that, if the humanitarian community is to transform the way people experience humanitarian crises, then the costs are justified. Long-range predictions about the frequency and intensity of crises suggest that global needs will only be met through investing in strengthened and strategic leadership.

Having recently taken up the post, the new Emergency Relief Coordinator, Valerie Amos – the world's most senior humanitarian – has an important opportunity to set the agenda. It is an opportunity that should not be missed: to make a commitment to evaluate the leadership pillar of humanitarian reform, and to focus greater efforts on building a coherent humanitarian partnership that transcends traditional boundaries and supports strong and accountable leadership.

⁵⁶ Donino A (2009) *NGOs and Humanitarian Reform: Mapping Study. Afghanistan Report*, Feinstein International Center. Commissioned by the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project.

⁵⁷ The ODI project aims to inform and support strategic analysis, decision-making, and the operational practices of humanitarian actors by developing and disseminating a guidance mechanism suitable for providing direct support to principled humanitarian decision-making at different levels in different contexts (from strategic policy level down to field level).

7.1 Recommendations

The need for the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) to prioritise progress against the leadership pillar of humanitarian reform

- In light of recent high profile humanitarian challenges in Haiti and Pakistan, it is now essential that the new ERC, Valerie Amos, commissions an independent evaluation of the leadership pillar of humanitarian reform.

Recruitment and deployment of Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs)

- NGOs and UN agencies must support the HC pool by putting forward high quality humanitarian leaders, and by participating in selection and appointment processes.
- The ERC must demonstrate her commitment to the accountable and transparent selection of humanitarian leaders through her commitment to reinforcing the HC recruitment and selection processes.

HC management and support

- HC performance management and appraisal must be strengthened. The ERC must establish a system to provide high quality management support, and the ERC-HC compact must be embedded in a continuous performance management system.
- OCHA must ensure that it can provide consistent and predictable support to the HC, and strenuous efforts should be made to establish surge capacity and standby rosters to support timely deployment.

Strengthening humanitarian partnership

- HCs have a responsibility to build Humanitarian Country Teams that meet IASC ambitions for providing strategic leadership that values diversity and fosters inclusiveness.
- Donors have an essential role to play in viewing agency commitments to humanitarian leadership and coordination as an essential part of humanitarian business, and providing funds to support this.
- NGOs and UN agencies that commit to participating in the HCTs should invest time and human resources at a level high enough to enable them to operate effectively.

Developing system-wide accountabilities

- The HC should strengthen partnership between HCT members by formalising mutual accountabilities between members through the use of work plans, and by establishing two-way feedback loops between members of the HCT and the HC.
- NGOs and UN agencies must prioritise participation in HCTs. Headquarters should ensure that HCT responsibilities are included in their staff's terms of reference (ToR), and that they are performance managed against these duties.
- The ERC should significantly strengthen the effectiveness of humanitarian response by developing a system of collective accountability to ensure greater responsibility across the humanitarian community for humanitarian response.

Accountability to crisis-affected people

- Given the impact of leadership failures on those receiving assistance, it is essential that HCs and HCTs deliver on their commitments to be accountable to crisis-affected people by adopting appropriate methodologies.
- NGOs, many already with considerable experience of accountability to crisis-affected populations, should actively support HCT and system-wide efforts to improve accountability.

Upholding humanitarian principles

- Strenuous efforts must be made by HCs to broker the application of humanitarian principles within the diverse membership of the humanitarian community, and to defend these robustly when they are under threat.
- Where fractures run deep within the humanitarian community, an approach by the HC that seeks to establish commonalities, defend bottom lines, and promote coexistence through transparent communication should be vigorously adopted.

Annexes

Annex 1: Bibliography

Because much of the information pertaining to UN humanitarian leadership is contained in grey literature, it is difficult to provide an accurate reference for all the documents; basic information such as author, publication date, or publishing body is at times difficult to discern. Strenuous efforts have been made in producing this bibliography to ensure as accurate referencing as the available information allows.

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Annex 3: Terms of reference

UN Humanitarian Leadership: What are NGOs' Expectations? Research Concept Note June 2010

Rationale for the study:

The five country mapping studies undertaken in 2009 for the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project all identified humanitarian leadership as a key challenge within the humanitarian reform agenda. Only one of the five countries, the Democratic Republic of Congo, had a Humanitarian Coordinator who played a strong humanitarian leadership role; in the other four countries, humanitarian leadership was weak and failed to address issues that NGOs perceived as priorities. The *Synthesis Report: Review of Engagement of NGOs with the Humanitarian Reform Process* argued that the leadership pillar of the humanitarian reform is pivotal for the success of the other components: coordination (clusters), partnership, and reformed humanitarian financing.

On the one hand, considerable strides have been made in improving humanitarian leadership since the humanitarian reform agenda was rolled out in October 2005, including setting up the HC Strengthening Project, establishment of the HC Pool and the HC selection and assessment panels, revision of HC terms of reference, and the introduction of HC compacts as part of their performance monitoring. An HC handbook has been elaborated, and considerable effort has been invested in training candidates for the HC Pool, as well as for Residential Coordinators who also have an HC function.

Yet to date there has been no system-wide evaluation of humanitarian leadership – the only pillar of the three original components of humanitarian reform that has yet to be evaluated. The cluster approach has now had two major evaluations (2008 and 2010), the Common Humanitarian Fund was evaluated in 2006, and the CERF had an interim evaluation in 2007, with a five year evaluation currently being commissioned, due for finalisation by March 2011.

While a number of research and academic institutions (ODI, Harvard University, ALNAP, Humanitarian Futures Project, Tulane University) have undertaken research and analysis on the role of humanitarian leadership in ensuring the effectiveness of humanitarian action, and there has been considerable debate within the humanitarian community about the merits and disadvantages of the ongoing practice of 'double hatting' Resident Coordinators with the Humanitarian Coordinator function, less attention has been focused on NGO perspectives on UN humanitarian leadership as the starting point.

Purpose and objectives:

Five years after the humanitarian reform process began, two of the three original pillars have been thoroughly examined and evaluated. However, humanitarian leadership has not yet been adequately reviewed, either from the point of view of NGOs, or based on the HCs' own experiences of trying to coordinate a disparate group of organisations known collectively as 'the international community'. This paper will explore this in greater depth, and seek to ensure that the UN's leadership role and expectations of it are more clearly understood. Specific objectives include:

- To document NGOs' expectations of HC leadership, and explore how NGOs can contribute towards ensuring effective humanitarian leadership
- To influence the behaviour of Humanitarian Coordinators and NGOs with regard to humanitarian leadership.

Outline:

Some themes continually arise when discussing humanitarian leadership:

- the lack of understanding and commitment of the RC/HC to humanitarian principles
- the difficulty for the HC to bring the other UN heads of agencies into a common strategy/understanding
- the disparate nature of the NGOs, and their often competing or conflicting views
- the lack of impartiality/neutrality of the RC/HC in an integrated mission
- OCHA's limited capacity in many countries
- the perception of poor performance management of RC/HCs, compounded by a lack of support from HQ
- the sometimes contradictory demands on RC/HCs emanating from HQ, and/or the differing nature of their various roles.

The following key areas of investigation for the study are based broadly on HC ToRs:

- Strategy setting: Prioritisation and ensure that funding decisions follow prioritisation and strategy
- Coordination and role of clusters
- Team building and leadership of HCT (using Principles of Partnership)
- Role in upholding and operationalising Principles of Partnership between humanitarian actors, and relating impartially to all humanitarian actors
- Representation with government / effectiveness in advocating for humanitarian principles, access, and humanitarian space

- Role in resource mobilisation, advocacy with donors, depoliticising assistance
- Accountability to crisis affected communities – recognising the needs of women and men, and ensuring these are being addressed properly through consultation and discussion with them
- Role in ensuring emergency preparedness, response and recovery, and contingency planning
- Role in information exchange, and ensuring that OCHA fulfils its role and mandate in-country.

The study will also examine:

- The potential impact of strong leadership by HCs, particularly in relation to such issues as:
 - Ensuring timely response
 - Ensuring transparency and accountability to crisis-affected populations
 - Ensuring effective coordination through leadership of the HCT, and holding cluster coordinators (cluster lead agencies) accountable for their commitments
 - Promoting partnership working
 - Strong advocacy on humanitarian principles and humanitarian space.
- Whether and how weak leadership by the HC impacts on the ability of NGOs to deliver effective and timely humanitarian response, for example:
 - Risk to humanitarian space
 - Humanitarian principles in jeopardy
 - Effective coordination endangered
 - Reduction of coordination (e.g. clusters or HCT) to an information-exchange function
 - Partnership working compromised
 - Little or no accountability to crisis-affected populations
 - Effectiveness of resource allocation in an equitable and timely manner.
- Provide a contextual analysis:

The study will site these factors within the context of the constraints of the current system, with a brief analysis of how the findings above are impacted by such systemic issues as the institutional constraints caused by HCs' dual role as RC, the complex blurring of lines between humanitarian action and political and military objectives – particularly in the context of integrated missions – and challenges related to limited management and accountability of RC/HCs for the humanitarian parts of their job. The study will also look at how the role of HCTs supports the HC function better to ensure positive humanitarian

outcomes, and draw on the views and perspectives of non-NGO humanitarian stakeholders also.

NB: While it is not within the remit of this study to undertake an assessment or analysis of the HC selection and recruitment process, the consultant should maintain a strong awareness of these processes and the ongoing debates around NGO engagement and ability to influence HC appointments – drawing, if necessary, on such examples to highlight or illustrate NGO perceptions.

- Recommendations:

The study will explore the views of NGOs on what they should and could do to contribute towards improved leadership as carried out by Humanitarian Coordinators, and make recommendations based on the study findings in close consultation with NGOs and the Humanitarian Reform Project. Recommendations in the study will reflect these views and those of other stakeholders, including the UN and donors, and is likely to cover the following aspects:

 - Management of HCs
 - Building teams around a common strategy
 - Requirements for NGO participation in the HCT
 - Implementation of Principles of Partnership by UN and non-UN
 - Building channels of communication and building trust.

Research methodology

Owing to the short timeframe for this consultancy, the research will be primarily qualitative, drawing on interviews with key humanitarian NGO and non-NGO informants, although this will be supplemented by survey results. Research support and additional resources are available through the NHRP's Project Manager and the four Humanitarian Reform Officers (HROs) in Afghanistan, DRC, Ethiopia, and Zimbabwe.

The consultant will:

- Undertake a short desk review of literature relating to humanitarian leadership, including IASC guidelines, OCHA materials, NGO policy and positions papers, and existing independent research
- Develop and undertake an appropriate NGO and non-NGO survey to meet the research purpose and objectives outlined above, and choose a relevant and representative sample of countries for survey coverage
- Use and illustrate survey findings in the final report to reflect NGO perceptions on humanitarian leadership

- Undertake one country-visit for face to face interviews and in-depth analysis
- Conduct NGO and key humanitarian informant interviews by phone across the identified country sub-set
- Devise focus group templates for HROs to carry out in project focus countries, providing instruction and support to HROs in leading these research meetings and using findings to inform report analysis
- Ensure the report is evidenced-based, where possible making use of country case-studies to confirm content and validate findings
- Host and lead a findings validation to test report messages with NGOs and non-UN meeting in London/Geneva.

Timing

The consultancy will be conducted in no longer than 20 days, with 15 days for the desk review, survey and responses, interviews and country visit, and five days for writing up and peer review of findings with the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project. The deadline for submission of the final draft will be October 15th 2010.

Management

The consultant will report to Annie Street, International Project Manager (IPM) for the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project.

The survey component of the research will be done in consultation with IPM, who will assist in the identification of NGOs and non-NGO interviewees across the country sub-set, ensuring that the individuals have relevant and first-hand experiences of engaging with humanitarian leadership at the country level, and draw on Humanitarian Reform Project consortium members to ensure wide survey coverage and responses.

Final output

A concise printed and electronic report of no longer than 4,000 words (15 pages maximum), with a two page executive summary summarising key NGO perceptions, and a maximum of six recommendations on how humanitarian leadership can be strengthened and the role NGOs can play in relation to this, in order better to meet the needs of NGOs and the affected populations served by the humanitarian community. Annexes must include the survey, a complete list of persons interviewed, TOR, methodology, bibliography, and profile of NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project.

Annie Street
Project Manager

Annex 4: Online survey analysis

1. How important is the leadership of the Humanitarian Co-ordinator for an effective humanitarian response (please choose ONLY 1 of the 3 options below)?

	%	Count
An effective response requires a strong HC	60.7	37
There are links between a strong HC and humanitarian response but an effective response can be made in the absence of a strong HC	36.1	22
The strength or otherwise of the HC makes little difference to the effectiveness of a response. Other factors are far more important	3.3	2

2. In what areas can HC leadership potentially have the most impact on the effectiveness of the humanitarian response (please rate 1 to 5, 1 having the most impact, 5 having the least impact)?

	1	2	3	4	5	Count
ensuring effective coordination	42.6	34.4	13.1	3.3	6.6	61
Leading humanitarian advocacy and defending humanitarian principles	63.9	18.0	8.2	3.3	6.6	61
Building trust and facilitating effective communication between all humanitarian partners	41.0	32.8	13.1	9.8	3.3	61
Ensuring that the humanitarian response is accountable to crisis-affected people	31.1	16.4	26.2	13.1	13.1	61
Other (please specify below)	63.6	13.6	9.1	4.5	9.1	22

3. In your experience how successful has the HC been in delivering against the following aspects of his/her leadership role (please rate 1 to 5, 1 being very successful and 5 being failure)?

	1	2	3	4	5	Count
Ensuring effective coordination	5.2	25.9	43.1	20.7	5.2	58
Leading humanitarian advocacy and defending humanitarian principles	1.7	20.7	44.8	22.4	10.3	58
Building trust and facilitating effective communication between all humanitarian partners	5.2	13.8	51.7	22.4	6.9	58
Ensuring that the humanitarian response is accountable to crisis-affected people	1.8	10.5	26.3	35.1	26.3	57
Other (please specify below)	11.1	11.1	33.3	22.2	22.2	9

4. In your experience how successful has your organisation been in delivering against the same set of criteria (please rate 1 to 5, 1 being very successful and 5 being failure)?

	1	2	3	4	5	Count
participating in coordination fora	33.9	41.1	17.9	7.1	0.0	56
Promoting and defending humanitarian principles	23.2	41.1	30.4	3.6	1.8	56
Building trust and facilitating effective communication between all humanitarian partners	17.9	41.1	32.1	8.9	0.0	56
Ensuring that the humanitarian response is accountable to crisis-affected people	12.5	28.6	39.3	16.1	3.6	56
Other (please specify below)	30.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	10.0	10

5. How significant are the following factors in undermining the success of HC leadership?					
	Very		Not		Count
Political interference	69.5	27.1	3.4		59
Failure of humanitarian partners to participate in coordination mechanisms and to prioritise vertical accountability to their HQ over horizontal accountability to the success of the humanitarian response	40.0	56.7	3.3		60
Inconsistency in the approach of humanitarian partners to upholding humanitarian principles	33.3	55.0	11.7		60
The limited capacity of OCHA to provide support to the HC	33.3	61.4	5.3		57
Other factors not listed (please specify below)	66.7	33.3	0.0		12

6. To what extent do you think the following factors that undermine the success of a humanitarian response are within the power of the HC to resolve?					
	easy		difficult		Count
Political interference	1.7	30.0	68.3		60
Failure of humanitarian partners to participate in coordination mechanisms	23.2	58.3	18.3		60
Inconsistency in the approach of humanitarian partners to upholding humanitarian principles	8.3	50.0	43.3		60
A prioritisation by NGO/UN field staff of vertical accountability to HQ rather than horizontally to the success of the humanitarian response	6.7	50.0	43.3		60
Other factors not listed (please specify below)	0.0	77.8	22.2		9

7. What do you consider to be the most important action that could be taken to strengthen UN Humanitarian Leadership?		No. Responses
Total Number who expressed a view		49
Strengthen HC recruitment and ensure the HC (/RC) has humanitarian experience		11
Separate out the HC and RC role		9
Strengthen the transparency and accountability of the HC to humanitarian partners		6
Prioritise negotiations on humanitarian principles/space/access		5
Strengthen participation in and coordination of humanitarian fora		4
Improve specific competencies (communication, planning)		4
Be more inclusive of national NGOs and capacity		3
Strengthen OCHA support to leadership		2
Improve the quality of training		2
Other		3

8. Do you think leadership and coordination would benefit if humanitarian organisations gave greater priority to broad humanitarian response objectives rather than to individual agency programmes and mandates?		
	%	Count
YES	87.5	49
NO	12.5	7

9. In what practical ways can humanitarian partners support the leadership of the HC and what impact will this have (please rate 1 to 5, 1 having the most impact, 5 having the least)?

	1	2	3	4	5	Count
By senior humanitarian staff (Country Directors) having formal accountabilities for the delivery of the broader humanitarian response (in addition to being held accountable to the delivery of their programme)	34.4	39.3	14.8	6.6	4.9	61
By HCT members strengthening or formalising mutual accountabilities to one another and to the team	31.7	50.0	11.7	5.0	1.7	60
By all humanitarian partners strengthening their commitment to participating in co-ordination mechanisms and resourcing this participation appropriately	42.4	37.3	15.3	5.1	0.0	59
By establishing a more consistent approach to upholding humanitarian principles and defending humanitarian space within the humanitarian community	43.3	35.0	18.3	3.3	0.0	60
By offering practical solutions to the challenge of strengthening accountability to crisis-affected people	33.9	40.7	18.6	5.1	1.7	59
By working with the HC to ensure the HCT meets the strategic expectations outlined in the IASC Guidance note	42.9	30.4	17.9	3.6	5.4	56

10. Which of the following best describes your occupation?

	Field	HQ	Count
NGO staff member	31	20	51
UN staff member	2	5	7
HC or HC support/management staff	1	0	1
Academic or research institution	1	0	1
Donor agency staff member	1	0	2

ANNEX 5: Interview guidance matrix

NGO Field Workers	UN HCs/HC Strengthening/ERC	UN Field Staff	NGO HQ Staff and Research Institutions
<p><u>Humanitarian Leadership:</u> How important do you consider the role of the HC to be for effective humanitarian response? Can you give examples from your experience of how HCs have contributed to this and what it was that he/she did that had the biggest impact? Can you give examples where the system has failed? What could have been done by the HC to have avoided this? What do you/NGOs want from the HC role? Can you list your 5 biggest priorities? In your experience are these being consistently delivered? What conditions are required to foster and support effective humanitarian leadership? In your experience, what influence does the HC have over the UN agencies? And the NGOs? Do you think this is sufficient or insufficient? If insufficient, how could this be strengthened? What needs to change for this to be achieved? What responsibility do other humanitarian partners have in supporting the efforts of the HC in strengthening co-ordination (UN, INGOs, LNGOs, Gov)? Can you give examples of when these responsibilities have either been met or not met?</p>	<p><u>Humanitarian Leadership:</u> How important do you consider the role of the HC to be for effective humanitarian response? To what extent do you feel that the HCs tend to shoulder the burden of success or failure of the broader humanitarian community irrespective of their own performance? As an HC what do you consider to be your 5 most important priorities? Given the demands of the job, how able are you to consistently deliver against these? What conditions are required to foster and support effective humanitarian leadership? What influence do you have to create an enabling internal environment – the UN agencies? And the NGOs? Do you think this is sufficient or insufficient? If insufficient, how could this be strengthened? What needs to change for this to be achieved? What external pressures do you face that limit your ability to achieve a successful humanitarian response? Do you feel that the humanitarian community recognise this (do you communicate it adequately?)</p>	<p><u>Humanitarian Leadership:</u> How important do you consider the role of the HC to be for effective humanitarian response? What do you consider to be the 5 most important priorities of an HC? In your experience are these being consistently delivered? What conditions are required to foster and support effective humanitarian leadership? In your experience, what influence does the HC have over the UN agencies? And the NGOs? Do you think this is sufficient or insufficient? If insufficient, how could this be strengthened? What needs to change for this to be achieved? What responsibility do other humanitarian partners have in supporting the efforts of the HC in strengthening co-ordination (UN, INGOs, LNGOs, Gov)? Can you give examples of when these responsibilities have either been met or not met?</p>	<p><u>Humanitarian Leadership:</u> How important do you consider the role of the HC to be for effective humanitarian response? Can you give examples from your experience of how HCs have contributed to this, and what it was that he/she did that had the biggest impact? Can you give examples where the system has failed? What could have been done by the HC to have avoided this? What do you/NGOs want from the HC role? Can you list your 5 biggest priorities? In your experience are these being consistently delivered? What conditions are required to foster and support effective humanitarian leadership? In your experience, what influence does the HC have over the UN agencies? And the NGOs? Do you think this is sufficient or insufficient? If insufficient, how could this be strengthened? What needs to change for this to be achieved? What responsibility do other humanitarian partners have in supporting the efforts of the HC in strengthening co-ordination (UN, INGOs, LNGOs, Gov)? Can you give examples of when these responsibilities have either been met or not met?</p>
<p><u>Partnership and Co-ordination:</u> Can you give ways in which the HC has facilitated effective partnership between different members of the humanitarian community? What practical steps have been taken to build trust and facilitate good communication? What have been the practical implications of success or failure in this? To what extent has the HC ensured that the composition and ways of working of the HCT reflect the PoP? And that the compilation of the CHAP does likewise?</p>	<p><u>Partnership and Co-ordination:</u> To what extent have you been successful in facilitating effective partnership between different members of the humanitarian community? Does the PoP provide sufficient guidance to create this? Has it been easy to operationalise the PoP? What have been the practical implications of success or failure in fostering partnership on the humanitarian response?</p>	<p><u>Partnership and Co-ordination:</u> To what extent is there evidence of an effective partnership between different members of the humanitarian community? What practical steps have been taken to build trust and facilitate good communication by the HC? What have been the practical implications of success or failure in this? To what extent has the HC ensured that the composition and ways of working of the HCT reflect the PoP? And that the compilation of the CHAP does likewise?</p>	<p><u>Partnership and Co-ordination:</u> Can you give ways in which the HC has facilitated effective partnership between different members of the humanitarian community? What practical steps have been taken to build trust and facilitate good communication? What have been the practical implications of success or failure in this? To what extent has the HC ensured that the composition and ways of working of the HCT reflect the PoP? And that the compilation of the CHAP does likewise?</p>

NGO Field Workers	UN HCs/HC Strengthening/ERC	UN Field Staff	NGO HQ Staff and Research Institutions
<p>Humanitarian Principles: In your experience, is the HC doing enough to promote and defend humanitarian principles? To what extent do you think it is within the HC's power to more positively influence the humanitarian environment? What are the limits of his/her power to influence political processes? Could it be as much a failure to communicate the impediments and trust to accept the limits of power rather than a failure to defend principles? To what extent do the different and often conflicting approaches of NGOs and UN agencies to humanitarian response undermine principles and reduce space? What else could and should the HC seek to overcome challenges to humanitarian principles or the perception that nothing is being done? What does the broader humanitarian community need to do?</p>	<p>Humanitarian Principles: How have you sought to promote and defend humanitarian principles? To what extent do you think it is within your power to more positively influence the humanitarian environment? Do you think that humanitarian partners understand and accept the limitations or are their expectations too high? To what extent do the different and often conflicting approaches of NGOs and UN agencies to humanitarian response undermine principles and reduce space? Could you do more to better communicate to humanitarian partners the political impediments to success to combat the perception of partners that too little is being done?</p>	<p>Humanitarian Principles: In your experience, is the HC doing enough to promote and defend humanitarian principles? To what extent do you think it is within the HC's power to more positively influence the humanitarian environment? What are the limits of his/her power to influence political processes? Could it be as much a failure to communicate the impediments and trust to accept the limits of power rather than a failure to defend principles? To what extent do the different and often conflicting approaches of NGOs and UN agencies to humanitarian response undermine principles and reduce space? What else could and should the HC do to overcome challenges to humanitarian principles or the perception that nothing is being done? What does the broader humanitarian community need to do?</p>	<p>Humanitarian Principles: In your experience, is the HC doing enough to promote and defend humanitarian principles? To what extent do you think it is within the HC's power to more positively influence the humanitarian environment? What are the limits of his/her power to influence political processes? Could it be as much a failure to communicate the impediments and trust to accept the limits of power rather than a failure to defend principles? To what extent do the different and often conflicting approaches of NGOs and UN agencies to humanitarian response undermine principles and reduce space? What else could and should the HC do to overcome challenges to humanitarian principles or the perception that nothing is being done? What does the broader humanitarian community need to do?</p>
<p>Downward Accountability: What do you consider the responsibilities of the HC to be with regards to accountability to crisis-affected people? In what ways has the HC facilitated accountability to such people a) in humanitarian planning processes, b) through the work of the HCT, or c) through the work of the clusters? Can you suggest a way in which accountability to crisis-affected people could be championed by the HC? What is the performance of your agency in respect of this? Is there an expectation for the HC to achieve success in something that we ourselves are failing to consistently deliver? How can the HC and NGOs improve their performance in this?</p>	<p>Downward Accountability: What do you consider your responsibilities to be with regards to accountability to crisis-affected people? In what ways can you and have you facilitated accountability to such people a) in humanitarian planning processes, b) through the work of the HCT, or c) through the work of the clusters? What is the performance of the humanitarian community in respect of this? Is there an expectation for the HC to achieve success in something that the broader humanitarian community is failing to consistently deliver? How can the HC and NGOs improve their performance in this?</p>	<p>Downward Accountability: What do you consider the responsibilities of the HC to be with regards to accountability to crisis-affected people? In what ways has the HC facilitated accountability to such people a) in humanitarian planning processes, b) through the work of the HCT, or c) through the work of the clusters? Can you suggest a way in which accountability to crisis-affected people could be championed by the HC? What is the performance of your agency in respect of this? Is there an expectation for the HC to achieve success in something that we ourselves are failing to consistently deliver? How can the HC and NGOs improve their performance in this?</p>	<p>Downward Accountability: What do you consider the responsibilities of the HC to be with regards to accountability to crisis-affected people? In what ways has the HC facilitated accountability to such people a) in humanitarian planning processes, b) through the work of the HCT, or c) through the work of the clusters? Can you suggest a way in which accountability to crisis-affected people could be championed by the HC? What is the performance of your agency in respect of this? Is there an expectation for the HC to achieve success in something that we ourselves are failing to consistently deliver? How can the HC and NGOs improve their performance in this?</p>
<p>Management: What are your perceptions of the management of HCs and the effectiveness of the HC compact? To what extent do you feel that HCs are held accountable for the delivery of their ToR? The HC is accountable vertically to the ERC and horizontally to members of HCT; to whom are you formally accountable? In what ways are you held accountable to the broader humanitarian system? And for the success of the HCT (is it in your ToR)? How can this accountability be strengthened? To what extent has the HC pool strengthened humanitarian leadership? What more could be done to further strengthen leadership? What do you consider to be the pros and cons of UN-experienced vs NGO-experienced HCs?</p>	<p>Management: How effective is the HC compact? To what extent do you feel that you are held accountable for the delivery of your ToR and provided with adequate management support? You are accountable vertically to the ERC (or other if double/triple hatted) and horizontally to members of HCT. To what extent do you consider that UN agency and NGO staff consider their horizontal accountabilities to HCT and for the broader humanitarian community? How can this accountability be strengthened? To what extent has the HC pool strengthened humanitarian leadership? What more could be done to further strengthen leadership? What do you consider to be the pros and cons of UN-experienced vs NGO-experienced HCs? In your view, what single thing could be done that would dramatically improve your ability to lead humanitarian response?</p>	<p>Management: What are your perceptions of the management of HCs and the effectiveness of the HC compact? To what extent do you feel that HCs are held accountable for the delivery of their ToR? The HC is accountable vertically to the ERC and horizontally to members of HCT; to whom are you formally accountable? In what ways are you held accountable to the broader humanitarian system? And for the success of the HCT (is it in your ToR)? How can this accountability be strengthened? To what extent has the HC pool strengthened humanitarian leadership? What more could be done to further strengthen leadership? What do you consider to be the pros and cons of UN-experienced vs. NGO-experienced HCs?</p>	<p>Management: What are your perceptions of the management of HCs and the effectiveness of the HC compact? To what extent do you feel that HCs are held accountable for the delivery of their ToR? The HC is accountable vertically to the ERC and horizontally to members of HCT; to whom are you formally accountable? In what ways are you held accountable to the broader humanitarian system? And for the success of the HCT (is it in your ToR)? How can this accountability be strengthened? To what extent has the HC pool strengthened humanitarian leadership? What more could be done to further strengthen leadership? What do you consider to be the pros and cons of UN-experienced vs. NGO-experienced HCs?</p>

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Published in November 2010