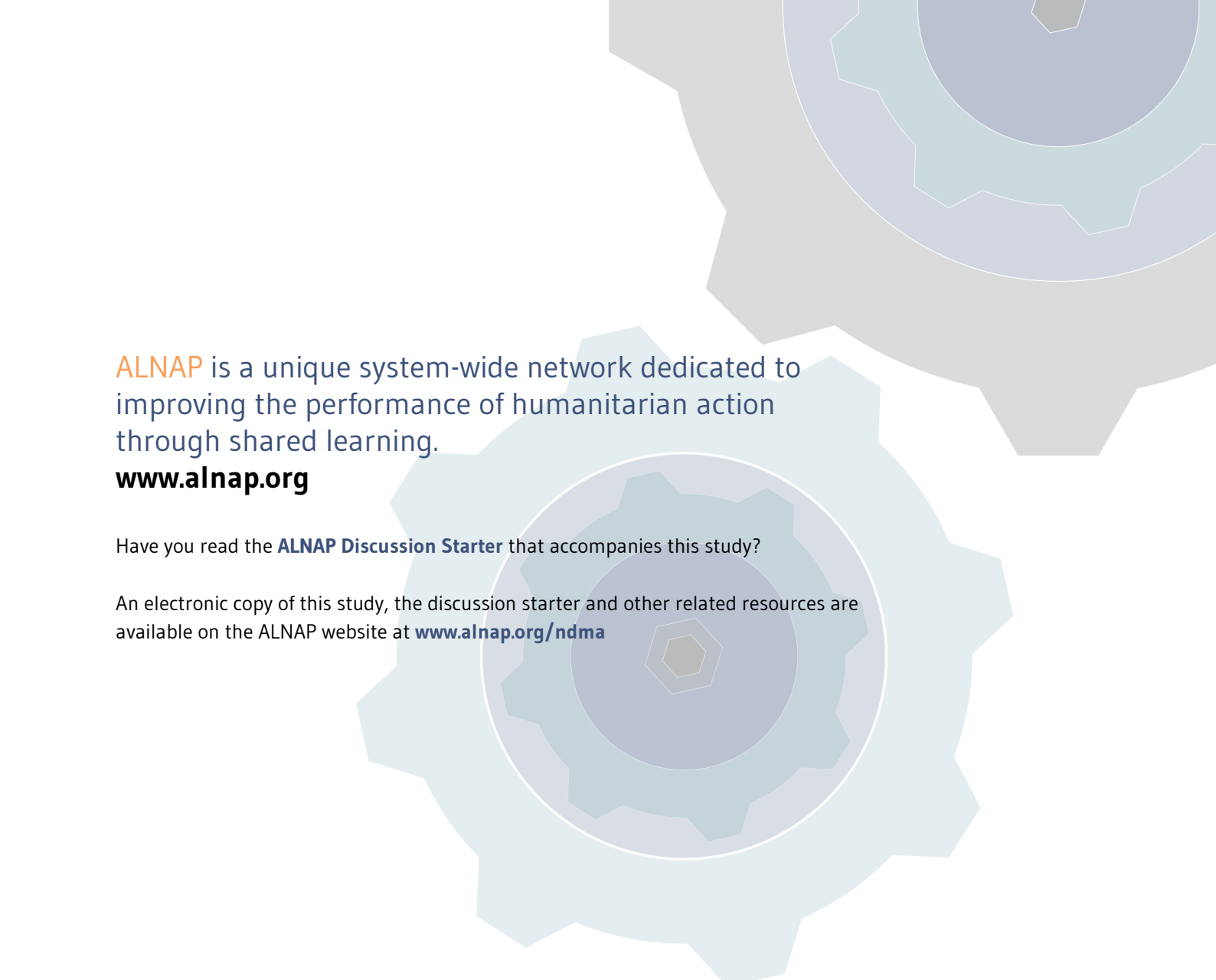




# LEARNING FROM DISASTER

How governments gain insight and how regional and international bodies can help

Andy Featherstone



ALNAP is a unique system-wide network dedicated to improving the performance of humanitarian action through shared learning.

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Have you read the **ALNAP Discussion Starter** that accompanies this study?

An electronic copy of this study, the discussion starter and other related resources are available on the ALNAP website at **[www.alnap.org/ndma](http://www.alnap.org/ndma)**

### **Suggested citation**

Featherstone, A. (2014) *Learning from disaster: how governments gain insight and how regional and international bodies can help*. ALNAP Study. London: ALNAP/ODI.

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ISBN 978-1-909464-65-0

Publication and communications managed by Maria Gili

Copy-edited by Amanda A. Morgan

Cover design and typeset by Jeni Burnell

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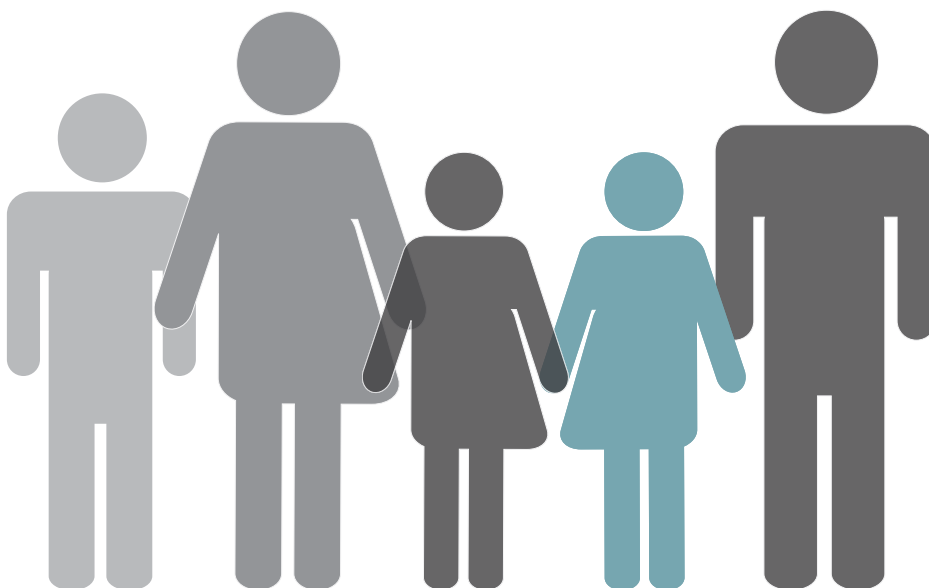
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**This study explores the ways NDMAs and other state actors learn and improve their humanitarian response activities.**



## Executive summary

### Context and purpose of the research

The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) has been working for a number of years to strengthen its links with National Disaster Management Authorities (NDMAs) and to better understand the relationship between disaster-affected states and the international humanitarian system. ALNAP's work on the ways in which humanitarian actors learn and improve has included a focus on learning activities within NDMAs, in the hope that the ALNAP membership can both learn from and contribute to it (ALNAP, 2013a).

This study builds on a recent host governments' forum on humanitarian response organised by ALNAP, which brought together senior representatives from governments across the globe to share experience and learning on responding to disasters. It explores the ways NDMAs and other state actors learn and improve their humanitarian response activities, with a view to identifying current practices, challenges that impede learning and improvement and ways in which collaboration with others has helped overcome these challenges. The study adopts a three-stage analytical model, in which knowledge is:

- created through research, evaluation, after-action reviews (AARs) and reflection
- organised in repositories, including online databases
- shared in standards, guidelines and staff training.

### Findings

While NDMAs' crucial role provides a compelling reason for investment in learning and improvement, they face structural and operational barriers to achieving this. As a government agency, an NDMA must compete for influence and resources with other government units and is subject to short-term political planning horizons and frequent staff rotations, all of which can compromise organisational learning. However, increasing global awareness of disasters provides new opportunities for NDMAs to promote policy and practice change, compete for resources, strengthen their learning and improve their effectiveness.

#### HOW NDMA LEARNING HAPPENS

NDMAs generate knowledge through a variety of methods including evaluations, AARs and formal and informal reflection. However, many lack the resources to consistently apply these methods, and thus valuable knowledge is often not systematically captured, analysed or shared beyond the NDMA.

Some NDMA do conduct capacity assessments and establish capacity development plans to identify and address gaps in knowledge. While some NDMA have limited capacity for internal dissemination of learning, online repositories are increasingly being used to organise information which can then be accessed and used by others. Formal processes of guided reflection are also used as opportunities to share lessons learned with other government ministries and departments, and were considered by NDMA participants in the study as important for strengthening understanding of and support for disaster management.

NDMA are increasingly both generating and sharing knowledge through mock exercises or simulations, which can strengthen trust between participants and allow them to take risks and learn in a safe environment. Lessons can also be shared by NDMA through the development of disaster policies and guidelines. NDMA performance is highly variable and often constrained by a lack of resources; only the better-resourced NDMA are able to establish a systematic approach to organisational learning.

### COLLABORATION FOR LEARNING

Although the international humanitarian system has struggled to coordinate effectively with NDMA, efforts to address this weakness are gaining momentum. A rich diversity of collaborative approaches to learning have been adopted – by international organisations and regional institutions as well as bilaterally between governments. Many of the weaknesses that hamper NDMA learning also exist in humanitarian organisations. But collaboration can help harness additional resources and strengthen shared practice, which can lead to more effective joint responses.

## Recommendations

NDMA already use a range of approaches to promote learning and knowledge management, and there are no one-size-fits-all solutions to the gaps and challenges that remain. However, several steps are worth considering as NDMA, and the international organisations and regional institutions that support them, seek to improve their learning process. These are discussed in depth in the conclusion to this report. Recommendations for NDMA include the following:

- AARs and evaluations undertaken after a disaster response are used by only a small number of NDMA and are often used inconsistently. Significant benefits can be derived from even modest evaluations and AARs, and greater use of these tools is recommended.
- Disasters offer NDMA a window of opportunity to promote institutional or legislative change. This opportunity is greatest where trust, resources and



**Disasters offer NDMA a window of opportunity to promote institutional or legislative change.**



effective communication exist, along with willingness and capacity to learn from practice and apply that learning to new contexts.

- The publication of NDMA evaluations and review reports can help identify weaknesses in policy and capacity and can support lobbying for additional resources for disaster management. Tracking progress against the recommendations made in those documents, through processes of formal reflection with other government ministries and through the publication of annual reports, can help ensure that these issues are followed up and help raise awareness of and support for disaster management across government.
- Support for NDMAs from other NDMAs, either provided bilaterally or facilitated by regional institutions, can be especially valuable, increasing shared understanding and promoting a focus on longer-term planning. This form of bilateral support remains poorly documented and would benefit from further study to more clearly identify current practices and ways to increase collaboration in the future.

Acknowledgement by NDMAs of barriers to learning and improvement provides an entry point for those seeking to support them. Past successes offer lessons on how such collaboration can be strengthened in the future. Recommendations for international organisations and regional institutions include the following:

- While the importance of strong links with host governments has been acknowledged, and initiatives to foster dialogue are increasing, much remains to be done. There is an urgent need for international humanitarian organisations to strengthen their links with NDMAs and to facilitate closer working relationships in order to demonstrate a practical commitment to collaboration.
- Humanitarian evaluations carried out jointly by NDMAs and international organisations could provide invaluable lessons and strengthen relationships, yet until now they have rarely if ever occurred. A pilot joint evaluation should be given high priority, with a view to promoting further such efforts in the future.
- The profile of an NDMA within its government affects its ability to harness resources and promote legislative change but such changes take time. Capacity development and partnership with government should be considered by international humanitarian organisations as a long-term strategic partnership and resourced accordingly.







## Acronyms

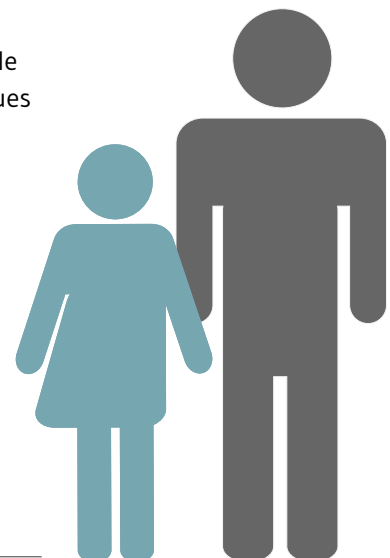
AAR	after-action review
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BNPB	Badan Nasional Penanggulangan
CDMP	Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DRM	disaster risk management
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
INSARAG	International Search and Rescue Advisory Group
NDMA	national disaster management authority
NEMA	National Emergency Management Agency
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NIDM	National Institute of Disaster Management
NRRC	Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
UN	United Nations
UNDAC	United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination

## 1. Introduction

The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) has been working to strengthen its links with national disaster management authorities (NDMAs) and to better understand the relationships between disaster-affected states and international humanitarian organisations and what can be done to improve these relationships, both during emergencies and on an ongoing basis. It has done this primarily by conducting research and hosting representatives from NDMAs at ALNAP Meetings.

In March 2013, ALNAP convened a small number of representatives from NDMAs and other relevant bodies to discuss the issue of learning and improvement by host governments, as part of a larger ALNAP Meeting on evidence and knowledge in humanitarian action. The briefing note for this session highlighted evidential and theoretical challenges to understanding how governments undertake and internalise learning on humanitarian issues (ALNAP, 2013a). In response, this study explores the ways that NDMAs learn and improve, focusing on current practices, impediments to learning and improvement, and ways in which collaboration with others has helped overcome these.

The initial plan was to interview two to three staff members from each of five representative NDMAs as well as staff from international organisations and regional institutions which collaborate with NDMAs to support learning and improve performance. This approach had to be adjusted, as only a few NDMAs participated in the research and each relied on a single representative for external communication, which limited the possibilities of follow-up and corroboration. All interviews were conducted by telephone. The interviews were supplemented by a web-based document review which included ALNAP's Humanitarian Evaluation and Learning Portal (HELP) and documents available in NDMA online knowledge portals. The limitations of discussing complex issues by telephone limited the depth to which specific topics could be explored.<sup>1</sup>



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1. Annex 1 describes in more detail the methodology used in this study; Annex 2 provides a list of study participants; and the full terms of reference for the study are provided in Annex 3.



**States organise themselves in different ways to plan for and manage disasters, influenced by factors such as hazards, culture, history, political objectives and current events.**



## 2. The role of the state in humanitarian response

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 46/182 asserts the state's primary responsibility for the 'initiation, organisation, coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory' but also asserts that where a state's capacity is insufficient it should seek international assistance (United Nations General Assembly, 1991). This provides the basis both for the development of national capacity and for collaboration with international organisations.

This section highlights government responsibilities in times of disaster, reviews different approaches taken by governments to managing disasters, and analyses the relationship between national and international humanitarian partners as well as recent initiatives to strengthen dialogue between the two.

### 2.1 Disaster management roles and responsibilities

Disaster management can be defined as the organisation and management of resources and responsibilities for dealing with all humanitarian aspects of disasters, in particular preparedness, response and recovery, in order to lessen their impact (IFRC, 2013). During a disaster the state is responsible for requesting international assistance, providing assistance itself, monitoring and coordinating external assistance and ensuring that it is provided within established regulatory frameworks. In order to fulfil these functions, most states have disaster management legislation and an entity mandated to manage and respond to disasters. That entity is referred to in this paper as a national disaster management authority or NDMA.

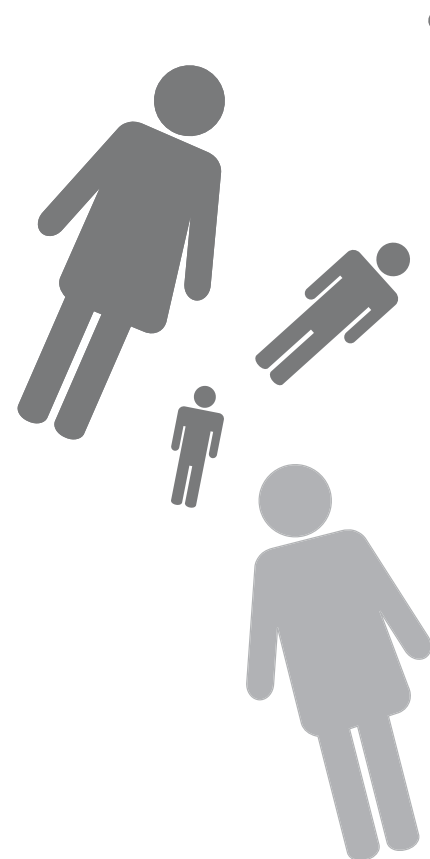
States organise themselves in different ways to plan for and manage disasters, influenced by factors such as hazards, culture, history, political objectives and current events. Participants in this study all came from countries with a centralised national disaster management system (see Table 1). Other countries use a decentralised model; for example, in the United Kingdom, the 2004 Civil Contingencies Act passed responsibility for emergency management to local government (McEntire and Mathis, n.d.). No one model is considered in the literature to be more effective, and different models have specific advantages and disadvantages.

In centralised models, the location of the national disaster management office in government has considerable implications for its ability to coordinate line ministries. NDMA's located in the prime minister's or president's office tend to have greater authority; those located in a line ministry may not be able to guarantee the participation of other ministries (Interworks, 1998). While decentralised systems of disaster management often benefit from greater local-level resourcing, research suggests that there is also a greater likelihood that



information flow between local and national authorities will become confused when disaster strikes, which can hinder coordination (O'Brien and Read, 2005).

In order to fulfil their responsibilities, the function of NDMAs includes management of administrative and procedural issues, development of policy and legislation, and institutional support and resourcing. At an operational level, NDMAs are responsible for coordinating preparedness, relief and recovery. Of growing importance to NDMAs is the subject of this study: evaluation of disaster responses, both for public accountability and to strengthen future policy and practice.



**Table 1. Country background of participating disaster management entities**

Country	Disaster management legislation	Disaster management structure
India	Disaster Management Act, 2005	NDMA is headed by the Prime Minister with a Vice Chairman (status of cabinet minister) and eight members (status of ministers of state).
Indonesia	Disaster Management Law, 2007	Badan Nasional Penanggulangan or BNPB oversees preparedness, coordination and response; the Head of BNPB reports to the President.
Kenya	Draft National Policy for Disaster Management in Kenya, 2009	Kenya National Disaster Operations Centre manages and coordinates disaster response at the national level, but responsibility is split across a number of departments and ministries.
Nepal	National Strategy for Disaster Risk Management, 2009 National Disaster Response Framework, 2013	Central Natural Disaster Relief Committee is chaired by Ministry of Home Affairs with participation from members of other ministries.
Pakistan	National Disaster Management Act, 2010	NDMA is the executive arm of the National Disaster Management Commission, headed by the Prime Minister.

## 2.2 Engagement between the state and the international humanitarian system

A key determinant of the strength of collaboration between the international humanitarian system and the state is the state's interest in assisting its citizens in times of disaster and its capacity to effectively do so (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Engagement between the state and the international humanitarian system**



Where a state has good international and political relations and a strong social contract with its citizens, acknowledges its responsibilities in disaster and invests in its capacity to fulfil them, there is considerable scope for collaboration between an NDMA and the international humanitarian system. In such instances where state capacity is significant, it may request only specialised services or seek to manage the response without international assistance. Conversely, where state capacity is weak, there will be a greater role for international agencies both to develop state capacity and provide disaster services. A situation in which a state is not willing to assist and protect its citizens offers the greatest likelihood of confrontation between it and the international humanitarian system.

In such situations, while there is a compelling reason to reinforce engagement with government both to strengthen the response and to encourage it to uphold its commitments under international humanitarian and human rights law, there may also be a tendency for humanitarian agencies to disengage from government as they seek to protect their independence and manage perceptions of their political neutrality.

Despite the need for collaboration and coordination, all too frequently, when a government requests emergency assistance, the international humanitarian system fails to work closely with it (see for example Streets et al., 2010; Grunewald et al., 2010). International organisations are highly diverse and many do good work; but the failure to adequately involve the host state has been a consistent feature of many humanitarian response evaluations:

*International relief efforts have often been criticized for ignoring, side lining or actively undermining local capacities. Examples include flooding disaster zones with international workers, or poaching local government staff, failing to coordinate properly with host governments, showing scant respect for local government officials and eroding the social contract by making it possible for governments to evade their own responsibilities. Although policies and inter-agency guidelines contain clear commitments to building national capacities, the practice often falls short of the rhetoric. (Harvey, 2010)*

States, too, can be inconsistent in their willingness to engage with humanitarian issues; while a state may respond in a timely and impartial way to a natural disaster and may welcome assistance from others, in cases of internal conflict it may seek to ignore and impede international assistance.

## 2.3 Efforts to strengthen partnership in humanitarian response

Despite the historical challenges of partnering with states on humanitarian response, greater efforts are now being made – by the international humanitarian system and regional institutions and through bilateral support – to build host government capacity for disaster management. Government preparedness for disaster response has strengthened across much of the world in recent years; together with similar advances by national non-governmental organisations (NGOs), this has led to an increase in capacity for domestic humanitarian response.

*A growing number of aid-recipient states, particularly in Asia and Latin America, are establishing or strengthening national systems to manage response to natural disasters, and increasingly insist on engaging with international aid actors on their own terms. This institutional growth in disaster management in recent years has included: new national legislation, operational and donorship*

*guidelines, a proliferation of National Disaster Management Authorities, and increased staffing and financial capacity in governments. (ALNAP, 2012a)*

“

**Three ways in which governments learn are learning by doing, learning from others and learning with others.**

”

The increase in NDMA capacity has raised questions about how to most effectively support NDMA learning. Three ways in which governments learn are (1) learning by doing – applying measures from their own experience and, depending on the results, continuing, revising, or dropping them; (2) learning from others – drawing parallels to their own situation and applying approaches used elsewhere; and (3) learning with others – sharing experiences and acting as equal partners in an open and transparent manner (Harvey, 2010). The third approach is probably the least frequently used, as countries tend to hesitate to admit to potentially unsuccessful actions. However, this approach can also be the most effective: even the most successful NDMA will never experience every type of disaster, and learning first hand with others can offer an important opportunity to expand knowledge beyond direct experience.

At the same time as NDMA capacity has grown, the concern has also grown that the capacity of the international humanitarian system may become overstretched, as mega disasters such as the Haiti earthquake, Pakistan floods and food insecurity in the Horn of Africa are interspersed with smaller, rapid-onset disasters such as typhoons, floods and landslides. There is also a financial imperative: while the number of lives lost to disasters may be dropping, the economic cost is rising ‘because a growing share of the world’s population and economic activity is being concentrated in disaster-prone places: on tropical coasts and river deltas, near forests and along earthquake fault lines. . . . Five of the ten costliest, in terms of money rather than lives, were in the past four years [2007-2011]’ (Economist, 2012).

As a consequence, there is growing interest in further strengthening national capacity for humanitarian response. This includes efforts to promote dialogue and partnership between national and international entities, increased support for regional cooperation and capacity building and the provision of bilateral assistance (north–south and south–south) for national disaster management.

### **STRENGTHENING DIALOGUE BETWEEN NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS**

Increased interest in partnership has been accompanied by increased efforts to foster dialogue with NDMAs. One of the most important forums for this is the United Nations (UN) Economic and Social Council, which in its 2011 Humanitarian Affairs Segment focused on strengthening inclusiveness, coordination, interoperability and effectiveness in humanitarian response and explored international and regional initiatives to support states affected by crisis (see UN Economic and Social Council, 2011).

Complementary to this have been ALNAP's work on governments affected by crisis (ALNAP, 2013c) and efforts by the Disaster Response Dialogue, an initiative of the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Council of Voluntary Agencies and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). At its first meeting in 2011, participants recommended a range of actions including efforts to share knowledge and foster dialogue on the humanitarian system. The Dialogue's website ([www.drdinitiative.org](http://www.drdinitiative.org)) provides an informal, action-oriented platform for governments and humanitarian actors (Disaster Response Dialogue, 2013).

An important contribution has also been made by the IFRC through the development and dissemination of International Disaster Response Law (IFRC, 2011), which was developed in 2007 as a set of recommendations to help governments prepare their regulatory systems for international disaster response. The guidelines advise on the minimum quality standards that should be required of humanitarian assistance as well as the kinds of legal facilities aid providers need to do their work effectively. They recognise the government of the affected state as having primary responsibility for disaster response, but they also acknowledge the role that international relief providers can play.

Strengthened partnership within the humanitarian community has also been a subject of discussion within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). While the development in 2007 and subsequent dissemination of the Principles of Partnership sought to strengthen coordination between different humanitarian actors, the Transformative Agenda, adopted by the IASC in 2012 to strengthen humanitarian response, makes reference to 'full transparency and accountability to all stakeholders including host governments' (IASC, 2012). While it may be too early to demonstrate tangible progress against this ambition, the emphasis placed on strengthening dialogue between the international humanitarian system and national governments is encouraging.

### THE EMERGING ROLE OF REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Recently there has been a rapid increase in the number and diversity of cooperation agreements on disaster response and risk reduction and a consequent growth in regional disaster-response institutions. While few studies exist of their relative strengths and weaknesses or the effectiveness of their support to member nations, there is a growing understanding of their role in brokering links between members and in strengthening cooperation in disaster management. As a consequence, in parts of the world, they are considered to offer important support for NDMA learning and improvement, as a recent study of best practice in national disaster management suggests: 'In both Indonesia and Colombia strong support from the regional political body . . . [has] enhanced local efforts in disaster response, and in turn national learning is transferred across the region through these institutions' (Walker et al., 2011: 45).

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**While there has been a historic focus on north-south knowledge transfers, a more significant role is now being played by south-south learning, which has the potential to provide peer support that is both contextually and culturally relevant.**

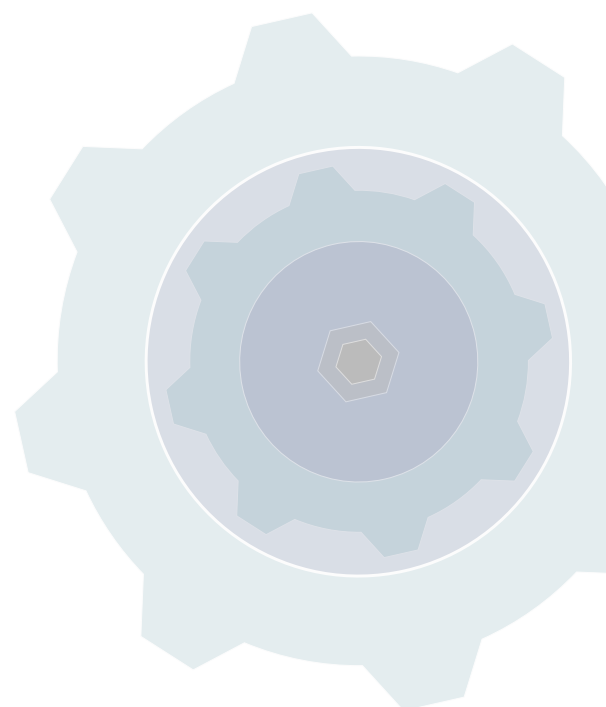
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Regional organisations have also played an important bridging role between international and national systems, drawing on shared language, trust or culture to establish common policies or resolve conflicts (Ferris et al., 2013: 38). However, the utility of regional cooperation can also be overstated; and while ‘actors in many regions have called attention to the importance of strengthening national capacities for disaster response and to developing relationships between international and national disaster management officials . . . there remain significant gaps between what is established in principle and what happens in practice’ (Harvey, 2010: 17).

### **BILATERAL SUPPORT FOR NDMA CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT**

Bilateral assistance (involving both OECD/DAC members<sup>2</sup> and others) is an important source of support for NDMA learning and improvement. While there has been a historic focus on north–south knowledge transfers, a more significant role is now being played by south–south learning, which has the potential to provide peer support that is both contextually and culturally relevant. While there is far less information available about government-to-government support than that which is provided through regional and international partnerships, interviews conducted for this study suggest that it is often the method preferred by NDMA staff (personal communication, Dody Ruswandi, Deputy Director for Emergency Response, Badan Nasional Penanggulangan [BNPB], Indonesia, and Muhammad Idrees Mahsud, Director, Pakistan NDMA).



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2. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) is a forum for selected OECD member states to discuss issues surrounding aid, development and poverty reduction in developing countries

### 3. Organisational learning and knowledge management

ALNAP defines learning as ‘the process through which experience and reflection lead to change in behaviour or the acquisition of new abilities’ (ALNAP, 2012). Implicit in this is a change in knowledge or skills which challenges the status quo and which can be considered successful when it leads to a change in practice. Argyris and Schon (1978) suggested that the key to organisational learning is reflective practice: the capacity of the organisation to support members to engage in a process of continual learning. The speed with which organisations can strengthen their response to disasters depends on their capacity to capture and critically analyse lessons. NDMAs have a compelling need to create an organisational culture committed to learning as ‘they need to survive and thrive in a changing environment’ (Torlak, 2004).



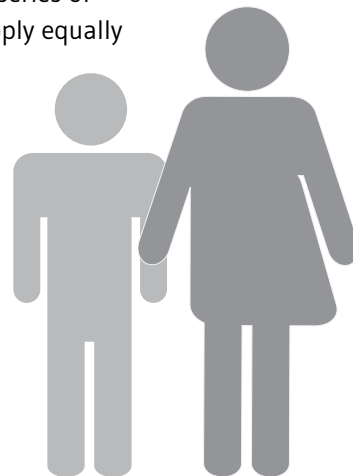
**The speed with which organisations can strengthen their response to disasters depends on their capacity to capture and critically analyse lessons.**



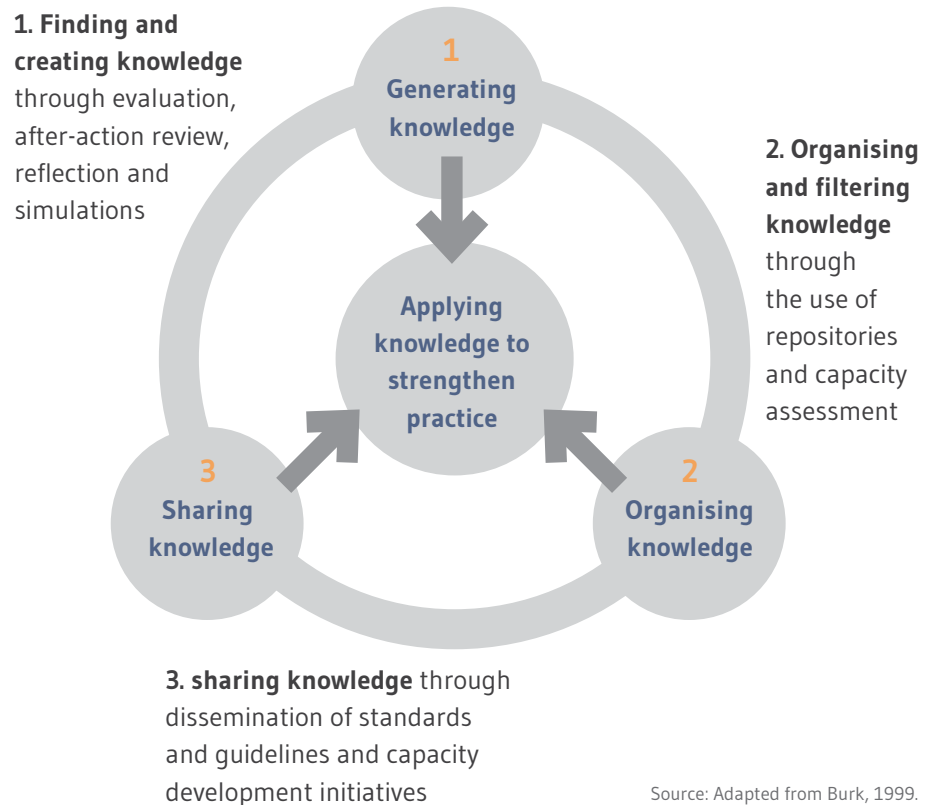
The lack of significant research on NDMA learning means there is no existing framework to assist in understanding how it occurs. This study used a framework that divides learning into three stages in which knowledge is:

1. Created through research, evaluation, after-action reviews and reflection;
2. Organised, for example in online repositories;
3. Disseminated through standards and guidelines and staff capacity development.

The application of these processes can result in changed practices and a more effective humanitarian response (see Figure 2). Like any abstraction of reality, this framework has limitations: with one exception (India),<sup>3</sup> NDMAs participating in this study did not present their learning as a cycle but rather as a series of discrete activities; also, some of the means by which NDMAs learn apply equally to more than one stage in the cycle.



3. India’s National Institute for Disaster Management is mandated to ‘facilitate knowledge management in disaster management’, the core functions of which include ‘a) knowledge creation through data collection, information generation and documentation, b) knowledge synthesis through research, c) maintaining a repository of knowledge and d) knowledge dissemination through training and capacity building’ (Government of India NDMA, n.d.).

**Figure 2. Cycle of learning**

### GENERATING KNOWLEDGE

Among the numerous mechanisms for creating knowledge and capturing lessons, two are common in disaster management: the **evaluation**, a 'systematic and impartial examination . . . intended to draw lessons to improve policy and practice and enhance accountability' (ALNAP, 2006: 14), and the **after-action review (AAR)**, used by a team to capture lessons learned from past successes and failures with the goal of improving practice in the future. The use of AARs across an organisation can help drive organisational change and, when applied correctly, can become a key aspect of the internal system of learning and motivation (Ramalingam, 2006).

Evaluations generally aim to produce objective, evidentially valid statements of fact, while AARs concentrate more on subjective knowledge gained from the experience of the participants in an action. In practice, however, the two often overlap, with many humanitarian evaluations, particularly those which stress the importance of learning, using methods commonly associated with AARs. Mock exercises or simulations are another way of generating, sharing, and applying knowledge (stages 1, 3 and 4 in the framework used for this study).

### ORGANISING KNOWLEDGE

Organising knowledge involves storing and preserving it in a form that others can access. The first step in this is ascertaining what knowledge exists; this can be achieved through a process of capacity assessment. With the expansion of online storage capabilities and the growth in the number of electronic documents available from disaster responses, online web portals and e-libraries have become increasingly common ways of making knowledge available to NDMA staff, particularly those that have limited access to other sources of information or training opportunities.

### SHARING KNOWLEDGE

The effectiveness of the knowledge management cycle relies on the ability to share knowledge. This is achieved through a variety of methods including the dissemination of lessons and good practice, formal training programmes and staff development initiatives. Staff training plays an important role in providing access to new knowledge and catalysing the learning of individuals and in turn enhances the ability of an organisation to change and adapt in response to a disaster. Knowledge is also shared by NDMAs through the development of standards and guidelines, which may have a legal basis and can help incorporate knowledge into practice.

Throughout each of these stages, effective learning requires that appropriate tools are applied to generate, organise and share different types of knowledge. Two key types of knowledge are explicit and tacit knowledge. **Explicit knowledge** is formalised and codified and is easy to identify, store and retrieve. It is the type of information that is captured in manuals, documents and procedures. The most significant challenges are ensuring that it is stored in a way that is easily accessible by others and that it is reviewed and kept relevant or discarded. **Tacit knowledge** is unconscious and intuitive and is often referred to as know-how. It is largely experience-based, context-dependent and personal and thus hard to communicate. It is generally stored in people's minds and hence is not easily captured by or stored in computerised systems. Tacit knowledge is the most valuable source of information for an organisation (Botha et al., 2008).

This report focuses on three stages of the cycle – generating, organising and sharing knowledge – to understand NDMA efforts to learn and improve and to identify ways in which collaboration with international organisations and regional institutions and participation in bilateral assistance arrangements have been effective in supporting these. The following sections explore each of these three stages in turn.



**This report focuses on three stages of the cycle – generating, organising and sharing knowledge – to understand NDMA efforts to learn and improve.**



## 4. How NDMA's generate knowledge

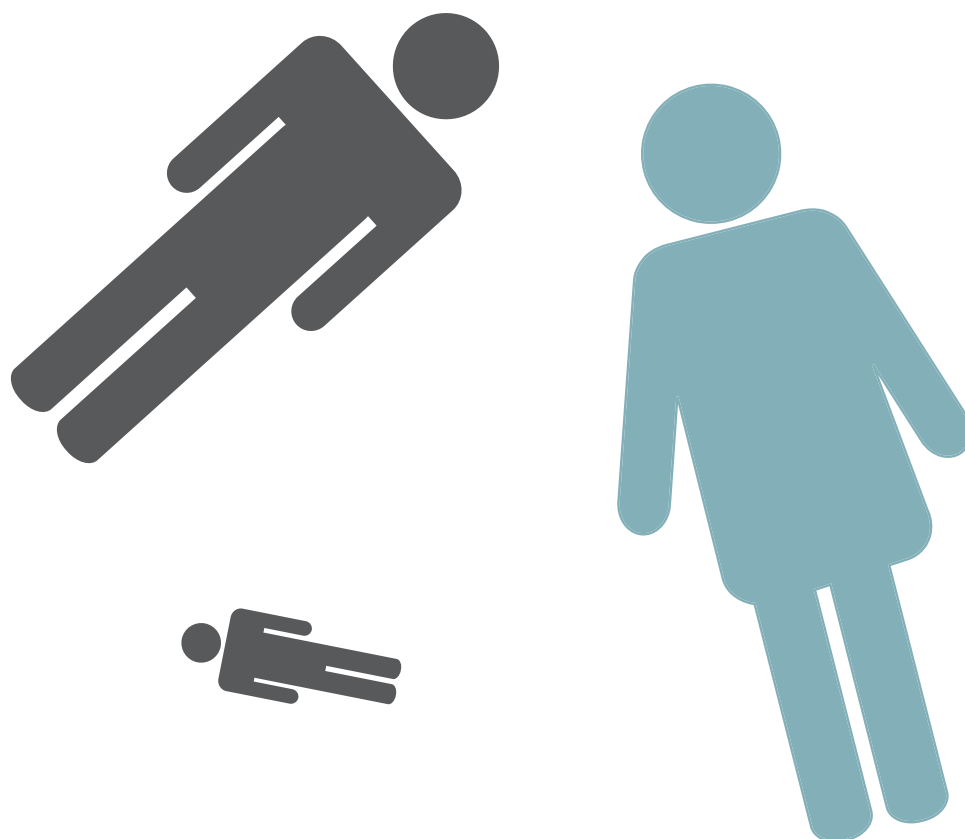
Three processes through which knowledge is generated by NDMA's are AARs and evaluations, formal and informal reflection, and mock exercises or simulations.

### 4.1 After-action reviews and evaluations

The use of AARs and evaluations tends to be different in OECD/DAC and non-OECD/DAC countries.

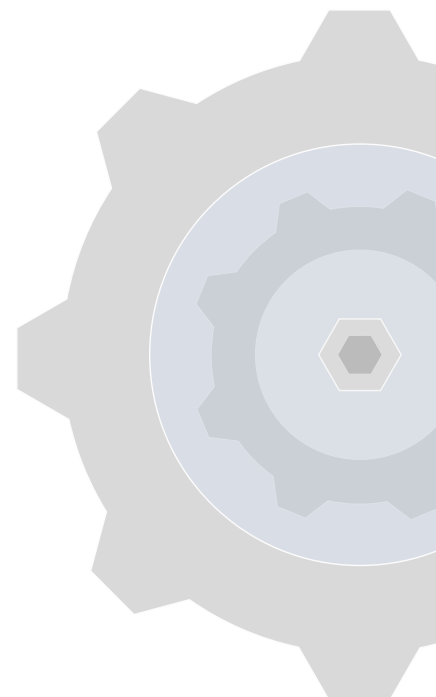
#### NON-OECD/DAC EXPERIENCE

Non-OECD/DAC NDMA practice has tended to conflate AAR and evaluation aims, with most exercises having a primary focus on lessons learned but also seeking to meet accountability needs. The majority of the reviews listed here were conducted by internal NDMA staff and hence cannot be considered impartial; however, many are self-critical and make recommendations to strengthen policy and practice. Recent such exercises by Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and Pakistan are summarised in Table 2.



**Table 2. Learning exercises in selected non-OECD/DAC countries**

Country	Disaster	Description
Bangladesh	2007 Super-Cyclone Sidr	56-page review of actions undertaken to facilitate preparation of a government strategy for recovery; authored by the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management; makes strategic and operational recommendations (Ministry of Food and Disaster Management, 2008)
India	2007 Bihar Floods	66-page reflections report containing a description of the response and lessons learned to strengthen future flood responses (NIDM, 2013c)
Indonesia	2009 West Sumatra Earthquake	185-page review documenting lessons learned from the rehabilitation and reconstruction process; includes an examination of national and local structures for disaster relief and regulations for earthquake response and reconstruction (Technical Support Team of the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction, National Agency for Disaster Management, 2011)
Pakistan	2005 Earthquake	90-page NDMA review including lessons for the future such as the need for a permanent body to manage disaster responses and the need to strengthen disaster management policy at all levels (NDMA, 2007)
Pakistan	2010 Floods	9-page NDMA lessons-learned summary based on consultations with stakeholders, written contributions by thematic clusters (supported by the UN) in consultation with their members, consultations within the NDMA, and a desk review of available documents; includes both operational and strategic recommendations (NDMA, 2011a)





The literature review carried out for this study suggested that AARs and evaluations are most often conducted in countries with national legislation on disaster management, an established NDMA and a department or national institute mandated to support learning. Interviewees from smaller NDMAs and other disaster management entities without a basis in national legislation spoke of a lack of financial resources or capacity for learning exercises. They spoke of the challenges of managing day-to-day operations – in some cases, senior staff had to undertake their disaster management roles concurrently with other responsibilities – and expressed frustration that, while their mandate included learning, capacity limitations prevented them from carrying it out.

Interviewees from NDMAs that have conducted post-disaster reviews underlined the important contribution the reviews made both to learning and to strengthening support for disaster management within the government. Representatives from Pakistan and Indonesia said that reviews had helped other government ministries and departments to better appreciate the role played by the NDMA and that they considered them an important internal advocacy tool.

Unfortunately, such reviews seem to be undertaken infrequently. Of the NDMAs that participated in this study, Pakistan (personal communication, Muhammad Idrees Mahsud, Director, Pakistan NDMA) and India have a statutory requirement for a review to be conducted following a national crisis. India's 2009 national disaster management policy outlines expectations:

*In the immediate aftermath of any disaster, field studies will be carried out, with the help of experts as an institutional measure. These studies will concentrate on identifying gaps . . . and also evaluate the status of preparedness and response. . . . This knowledge will be disseminated to all concerned within the country and also shared with international organisations. (Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, 2009)*

While the policy suggests the need to evaluate the response to any disaster and to make the results publicly available, India's National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM) has made only one review of the 2007 Bihar Floods, available on its website. In an encouraging sign, however, following the flooding in the state of Uttarakhand in June 2013, it reported that the process of documenting the response has already been initiated, 'with an objective to understand the causes, impact and lessons learnt from this disaster' (National Institute of Disaster Management, 2013b).

The team conducting a review for the Pakistan NDMA following the 2010 Floods (NDMA, 2011a) included an independent consultant. Its report offered critical reflections on the organisation of the government and key humanitarian partners including the UN and NGOs. It also provided a brief analysis of the operational response and a review of the effectiveness of the coordination

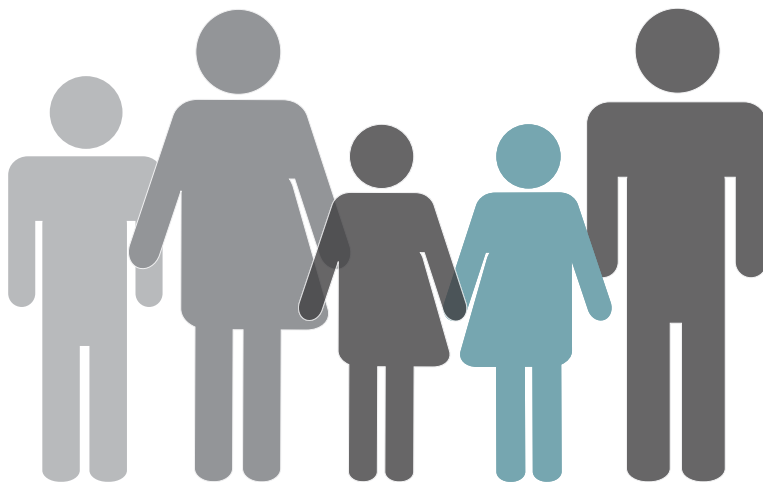
structures. Its recommendations included a significant focus on strengthening internal capacity and coordination. The report is both insightful and thoughtful; while it is a summary of a larger document which is not available online, it suggests tangible actions to strengthen national policy and practice.

Many of the issues raised in that review were also outlined in the NDMA's 2010 annual report (NDMA, 2011b) and were followed up in the 2011 annual report (NDMA 2012), which provides evidence of changes that may in part have been triggered by the review. One of the more significant recommendations, increasing the capacity of the NDMA, was acted on, which facilitated progress toward fulfilling several other recommendations, including the development and implementation of standard operating procedures. Efforts were also taken to strengthen staff capacity. In 2011 the NDMA action plan was approved, and a committee of parliamentarians was convened to help strengthen ties with provincial disaster management authorities and integrate federal and provincial disaster responses – a key concern raised in the 2010 Floods Review and highlighted in the 2010 Annual Report. Other recommendations were not acted on; a number of these are referred to in the 2010 and 2011 Annual Reports as still requiring action.

The interview highlighted the importance the NDMA attaches to the floods evaluation and a similar process that was undertaken shortly after the 2005 earthquake (personal communication with Muhammad Idrees Mahsud, Director, Pakistan NDMA); the follow-up evident from successive annual reports shows a strong commitment to learning and improvement. The inclusion of an external consultant in the 2010 review was considered by the NDMA Director to have brought a broader perspective and strengthened the quality of findings and recommendations and the credibility of the report with external organisations.

### OECD/DAC NDMA EXPERIENCE

For comparison, a review of the approaches to AAR and evaluation by the NDMA of selected OECD/DAC donor governments is presented in Table 3.





**Table 3. Learning exercises in selected OECD/DAC countries**

Country	Disaster	Description
Australia	2012 Victoria Floods	73-page independent review undertaken by the Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner (Department of Justice, 2012) 48-page response to the review, with a focus on strengthening flood management and coordination, undertaken by the State of Victoria (Victorian Government, 2012)
Japan	2011 Earthquake and Tsunami	Publication produced jointly by the Japan International Cooperation Agency, World Bank and Global Facility for Disaster Risk Reduction summarizing results of lessons-learning exercises following the disaster (World Bank 2012) Summary of the Japan International Cooperation Agency's review of the response, documenting practice and lessons learned (Katsube, 2013)
New Zealand	2011 Earthquake	243-page independent review of government response and recovery efforts, focusing on policy and practice change

While they exhibit the same dual focus on accountability and learning, these exercises seem to be more frequently conducted by an independent team and followed up with a public response indicating how recommendations will be taken forward. The focus on public accountability in addition to learning makes publication of the documents more likely. The question this presents is the extent to which routinely involving independent experts in reviews and publishing findings facilitate or inhibit learning. Opening disaster response to objective scrutiny can result in more ambitious proposals for change, but these may not be owned and followed up. An ALNAP study on the utilisation of evaluation summarised this dilemma:

*Efforts to ensure the independence of evaluators and evaluation units are essential to protect the credibility of the findings but can inadvertently undermine use. . . . Independence can lead to a perception that evaluation is too far removed from operational and organisational realities. If evaluation is regarded as a somewhat academic exercise carried out by specialists, it can be viewed as opaque and resistant to users' needs. (Sandison, 2006)*

### JOINT AFTER-ACTION REVIEWS BY INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND NDMAS

Partnership with the humanitarian system has been particularly successful in complementing national capacity to learn from disaster responses. These collaborative activities have made an important contribution to the creation of knowledge and have laid the foundations for practice to be strengthened. The added value of the knowledge offered by international organisations is recognised in India's National Disaster Management Guidelines:

*In the context of disasters they [NGOs] operate without boundaries. This in itself promotes learning and often played an important supplementary role to the efforts of the Government especially in post disaster phases. As they bring in experience from other disaster affected areas, they are in a position to provide effective solutions to various challenges and these have led to excellent partnerships with Government during some of the past disasters. (National Disaster Management Authority, 2010)*

This experience has been used to good effect in hosting collaborative AARs. While the need for sensitivity and diplomacy may limit the extent to which these exercises can realise their full potential, their success in cutting across traditional learning boundaries makes an important contribution to understanding humanitarian response and strengthening partnership.

Several joint AARs, most often commissioned by the UN, have been conducted in the last 10 years. Each generated significant learning on issues of operational management, disaster policy frameworks, coordination and capacity (see Table 4). In undertaking the process jointly, the reviews strengthened trust between humanitarian partners and offered an opportunity to discuss and understand different approaches to disaster response.

**Table 4. Selected joint after-action reviews**

Country	Disaster	Year	Review facilitated by	Type of lessons learned			
				Disaster response	Disaster policy	Government coordination	Government capacity
Indonesia	Tsunami	2005	UN, NDMA	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kenya	Election preparedness	2013	OCHA	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mozambique	Flood	2001	UN, NDMA	✓	✗	✓	✗
Nepal	Floods	2008	UN, NDMA, Red Cross	✓	✗	✓	✓
Philippines	Typhoon	2006	UN, NDMA	✓	✓	✓	✓



**The literature review uncovered very little evidence of joint humanitarian evaluations by NDMAs and the international humanitarian system.**



### JOINT HUMANITARIAN EVALUATIONS BY INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND NDMAS

In contrast with joint AARs, the literature review uncovered very little evidence of joint humanitarian evaluations by NDMAs and the international humanitarian system. In the ALNAP Horn of Africa Learning and Accountability Portal ([www.hornofafricaportal.org](http://www.hornofafricaportal.org)), which was launched in 2011 and covers the response in Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia – a database of over 60 evaluations and 44 reports and case studies – only one evaluation included the relevant disaster management authority as a significant partner.<sup>4</sup> It is not possible to determine the reason for this but while in the case of Somalia, where there is limited access to large parts of the country, the lack of joint evaluations is not surprising, for Kenya and Ethiopia the absence is less easy to justify and is disappointing.

Inter-agency real-time evaluations adopted by the IASC has yielded valuable lessons, although these have rarely included significant participation by the host government (Walker et al., 2011). That is not to say there is no demand for such an initiative; in the first meeting of the Disaster Response Dialogue, a recommendation was made to ‘put learning into practice’ through ‘independent evaluation of disaster response, including both national and international response, led by governments of affected countries’ (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation et al., 2011).

While the 2011 consultation process conducted in Bangladesh, Haiti and South Sudan to explore the potential for joint evaluation through the IASC initiative on Joint Humanitarian Impact Evaluations are encouraging, progress towards trialling such an approach has stalled. The consultation mission highlighted broad support for both the inclusion of the host government in the process and the significant potential for the exercises to contribute to lessons learned. Of interest to this study are the perceived benefits of a mixed evaluation team with national/government and international members which would offer both a wider humanitarian perspective and an in-depth analysis of the national context as well as government participation in and ownership of the exercise (Beck, 2011).

## 4.2 Formal and informal reflection

Several NDMA participants highlighted the contribution made to learning by processes of internal reflection. Indonesia’s BNPB holds three meetings each year to discuss disaster policy as well as an annual coordination meeting to which all government ministries are invited. The purpose of these meetings is

4. The Ethiopia study for the IASC Real Time Evaluation of the Humanitarian Response to the Horn of Africa Drought Crisis was considered to have had the greatest success in incorporating government participation.

to ensure that national policy guidance on disasters remains relevant and is disseminated across government as a whole. Mozambique's NDMA undertakes an annual desk review of relief operations to inform its planning process (Walker et al., 2011).

A number of NDMAs also capture reflections and lessons learned in annual disaster reports. Recent reports were available for India, Indonesia, Pakistan and Nepal. The India Disaster Report 2011 noted the importance of incorporating 'lessons from the past disasters in our present to break the vicious cycle of hazards turning into disasters' (Anandha Kumar et al., 2012) and documented lessons from the floods in Odisha, the Sikkim Earthquake, the Karnataka Drought, and Cyclone Thane. A five-year progress report and a 2012 disasters report are available in Indonesian on the BNPB's website ([www.bnpb.go.id/pubs/index/12](http://www.bnpb.go.id/pubs/index/12)); which were not reviewed for this report because they are in the Indonesian language. At time of writing, annual reports from Pakistan's NDMA were available for 2007-2012, documenting a variety of achievements, challenges and innovations and highlighting policy issues relating to disaster risk reduction, risk management, coordination and innovation. Interviewees said that NDMAs find annual reports valuable in documenting progress towards engaging government and non-government stakeholders in emerging areas of policy and in bringing disaster management issues onto the national policy agenda.

### 4.3 Simulations

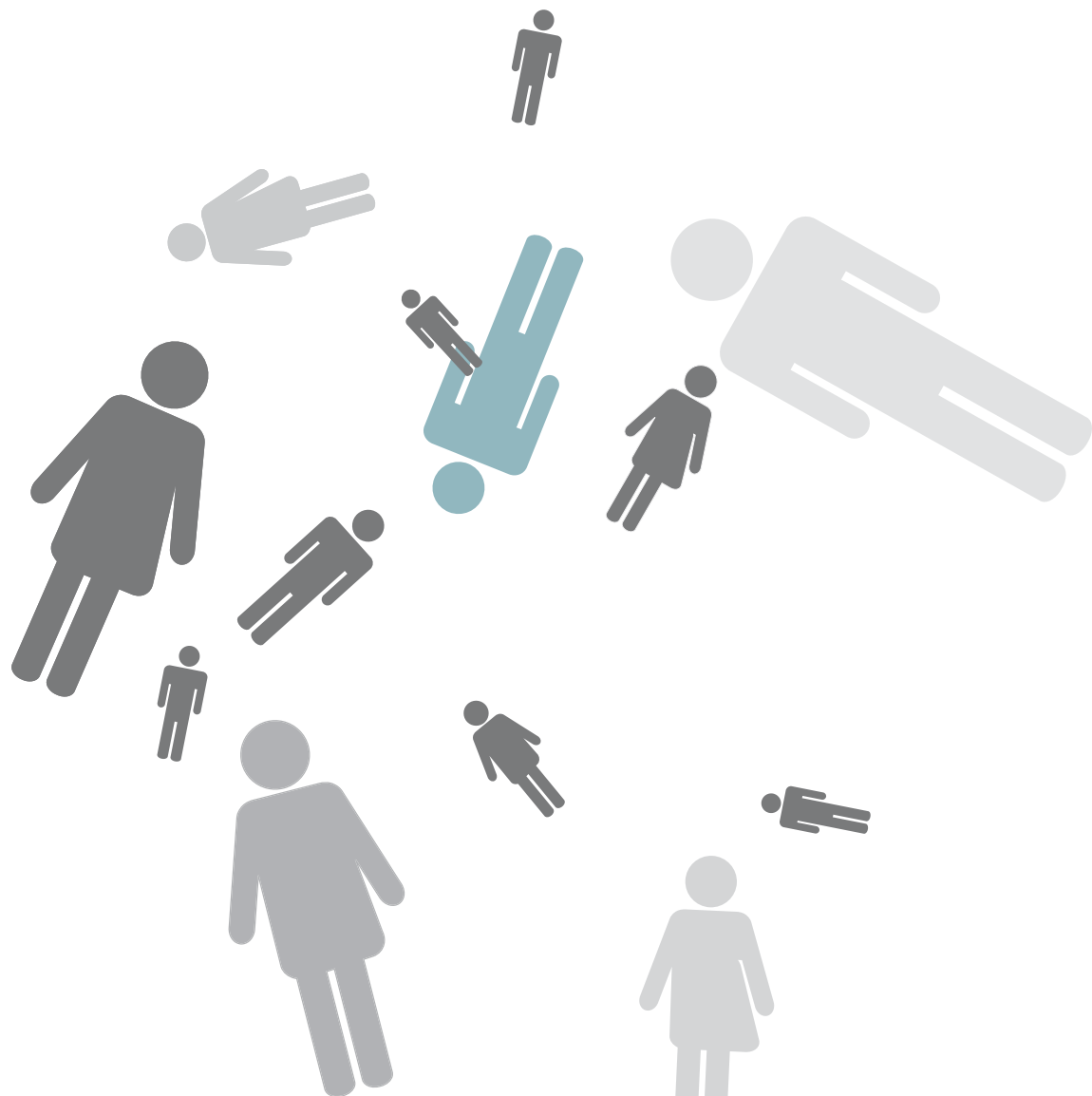
Mock exercises or simulations are frequently used to prepare for and learn from disasters, although only the better-resourced NDMAs can host them without outside support. They are compatible with the preferred training style of many disaster management practitioners – learning by doing – and offer some important advantages over other forms of training:

*Learners undergoing simulation-based training achieve deeper understanding, higher levels of confidence, retain knowledge longer, show a greater interest in the subject matter and are better able to transfer their learning to their job than those exposed to more conventional training methods. (Hoberman and Mailick, 1992)*

Simulations are used both for targeted learning and for testing disaster management systems. In addition to simulations based on past experience, some NDMAs conduct exercises based on hypothetical future disasters. A recent mock exercise in India used a chemical disaster scenario to address the perceived inexperience of the emergency services to responding to this type of disaster. The exercise identified gaps in capacity, knowledge and coordination and produced recommendations for different departments and ministries. In addition to testing new techniques and responses to different types of

disasters, simulations offer an opportunity to test and strengthen collaboration between responders and help participants understand the roles and approaches of other ministries and agencies in emergency response. Following field- and desk-based disaster simulation exercises in Mozambique in which all line ministries and operational relief agencies participated, the Deputy Director General of the National Institute for Disaster Management said the exercises had played a significant role in fostering trust and cooperation between the national government and the international aid community and increasing the effectiveness of Mozambique's disaster response (Walker et al., 2011). There is a broad consensus that simulations present a safe environment in which to test disaster management tools and to build trust between government and humanitarian partners (see Hockaday, D. and Lumsdon, S. 2012).

There has been significant growth in collaboration, both between NDMA's and international organisations and between different countries, in the use of whole-of-government disaster simulation exercises (see Table 5).



**Table 5. Selected disaster-management simulations**

Regional and intergovernmental exercises	Exercises involving NDMAs and international organisations
Indonesia, 2013/14: The Mentawi Megathrust Disaster Relief Exercise includes a series of exercises in response to a tsunami in the coastal regions of Sumatra and the Mentawi Islands. Participants include BNPB, government ministries, 10 ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) member countries and 8 other countries.	Nepal, 2013: The International Search and Rescue Advisory Group earthquake simulation is intended to improve coordination between local, international and regional search and rescue organisations.
Philippines, 2012: The Balikatan Exercise simulated the effects of an 8.1-magnitude earthquake. Participants included the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), USAID, US armed forces, UN agencies, IFRC and NGOs.	Philippines, 2012: The simulation by the World Food Programme and National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) was based on a scenario of two typhoons striking Luzon. National, regional, provincial and municipal government officials collaborated to understand how all government levels and the humanitarian community would respond to an emergency.
Trinidad and Tobago, 2011: Fuerzas Aliadas Humanitarias was a regionally oriented simulation of an earthquake which included the National Emergency Operation Centre and the governments of the US, UK, Canada, Guyana and Suriname.	Kenya, 2012: A general elections simulation was held by the Emergency Capacity Building Project in coordination with the World Food Programme's readiness initiative to practice coordination mechanisms described in national humanitarian contingency plans and multi-agency rapid assessments and to build trust between UN, NGO and government partners.

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**Simulations should be as realistic as possible. Expertise and financial or logistical support from external organisations can help achieve this goal.**  
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Simulations should be as realistic as possible. Expertise and financial or logistical support from external organisations can help achieve this goal. Including a broad range of stakeholders in simulations also strengthens relationships and builds trust. For example, a member of Kenya's Crisis Response Centre suggested that the 2012 Emergency Capacity Building Project's general election simulation helped ease historic tensions between different actors and improve mutual understanding of roles and responsibilities, in addition to improving participants' capacity for humanitarian response.



## 5. How NDMA's organise knowledge

Two processes through which knowledge is organised by NDMA's are capacity assessments and the establishment and use of online repositories.

### 5.1 Capacity assessments

To spend learning resources effectively it is first necessary to know what knowledge already exists and where the gaps lie. This review only found one example of a formal NDMA attempt to determine learning needs and better target staff development, conducted by India's NIDM. Having identified that 'disaster managers located with the government departments, professionals in the private sector and people working with NGOs are actually not trained to take up such jobs' (National Institute of Disaster Management, 2013a), the NIDM reviewed training programmes to identify gaps as the basis for a national effort to create a cadre of disaster management professionals.

Some NDMA capacity assessments have been undertaken by international organisations and regional institutions. For example, a group of international organisations recently assessed Nigeria's National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) after NEMA's recognition of limits to its disaster management capacity and a dialogue between its Director General and the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator. Using tools developed by the Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative, the assessment sought to identify gaps and challenges and propose recommendations for strengthening capacity. As a follow-up to the study, a strategic partnership for preparedness was outlined to strengthen national disaster management, propose linkages between the international humanitarian system and national mechanisms and prepare a report outlining action required to strengthen disaster management in Nigeria. The focus on longer-term support is a welcome accompaniment to the capacity assessment.

For a capacity assessment to lead to long-term change, commitment and continuity are important. This can be especially difficult if the assessment was conducted by external experts, as it may lack the ownership that an internal exercise can inspire. An evaluation of the Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative noted that while the initiative did develop a concept and methodology for national capacity assessments, its sustainability depended largely on 'how effectively the process and outcomes are anchored within UN Country Team mechanisms and programmes – as well as ownership of stakeholders over the entire process' (Alam, 2012). Nigeria's proposal of longer-term linkages and follow-up by NEMA is one example of the type of commitment needed.

While external support for capacity assessments appears to be rare, it does offer an NDMA an opportunity to receive an independent review of its capacity which can identify weaknesses in structures and systems. This can be used to support internal efforts to lobby government for additional resources.

## 5.2 Online knowledge repositories

With the rapid increase in online storage capacity and digital documentation, disaster management web portals have become increasingly common. Many NDMAs now have developed their own, either linked to their own websites or hosted by a national disaster management institute. Many of these contain only internal publications, but a few hold external resources or provide links to them.

If they contain relevant material and are well organised and updated, such portals can offer an important knowledge resource, particularly to disaster management personnel at the sub-national level, who may have less access to other learning opportunities. In some of the larger countries, particularly those with decentralised disaster management systems, access to updated policy documents, standard operating procedures and national guidelines was considered by NDMA participants in the study as an essential means of ensuring disaster management staff could work effectively (personal communication with Dody Ruswandi, Deputy Director for Emergency Response, BNPB, Indonesia, and Muhammad Idrees Mahsud, Director, Pakistan NDMA).

There are a growing number of regional initiatives to develop web portals and host online knowledge repositories. The South Asia Association of Regional Cooperation's (SAARC's) Disaster Management Centre makes many of its own publications available online as well a range of country profiles and disaster management information. It also hosts the South Asian Disaster Knowledge Network (<http://www.saarc-sadkn.org/about.aspx>). The Jakarta-based ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance has real-time disaster data for ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries (<http://www.ahacentre.org/>) and plans to expand this to include a library of regional documents on disaster management (personal communication with Mr Said Faisal, Executive Director, Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management, ASEAN).

In the absence of national repositories regional web portals can be of significant value, but this may change as national capacity increases. The websites for Pakistan's and Indonesia's NDMAs currently contain links to a small number of documents, but study participants spoke of plans to expand these. Where documents relate to a specific theme or geographic sub-region, there may be a far greater justification for holding them at a regional level. A good example of this is the Caribbean Disaster Information Network's virtual disaster library, which includes documents, presentations and maps directly related to the Caribbean region.



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## 6. How NDMA share knowledge

Processes through which NDMA share knowledge include staff capacity development, peer learning, formal sharing of lessons learned, disaster management institutes, e-learning initiatives and development of guidelines, codes of conduct and minimum standards.

### 6.1 Staff capacity development

While only one interviewee representing an NDMA spoke of a comprehensive internal training programme linked to a learning needs assessment, all participants in the study spoke of capacity gaps, particularly at provincial and district levels, and highlighted the important role that capacity development plays in disseminating lessons learned and other types of knowledge.

Although interviewees frequently mentioned attending external training courses as a means by which NDMA learned from others, some were sceptical about their value when conducted in the absence of a capacity assessment. In the same way as lessons are often not learned and hence fail to contribute to organisational knowledge, there can be a disconnect between the theoretical objectives of capacity building and its practical results. Participation in international training programmes was seen by some NDMA review participants as a reward to senior staff for good behaviour, or a benefit to be shared equitably between staff, rather than a tool for staff or organisational development. Interviewees also expressed concern about the low expectations training participants' had regarding the use of their new knowledge in their work or dissemination of it to colleagues. This concern was exemplified in a newspaper report following the April 2013 building collapse in Bangladesh, which quoted an official as saying:

*30 to 40 senior officers trained in using the equipment had not passed on their knowledge to the rescuers on the ground at Rana Plaza. . . . 'The one who goes in inside typically is not a commanding officer. Those that do are untrained. There were no senior people going into the holes.'* (Daily Telegraph, 2013)

Several NDMA representatives questioned the merits of overseas disaster management training courses taught in foreign languages, saying that this put trainees at an immediate disadvantage. For countries with limited training opportunities, the courses were often considered too advanced, and this was seen as compromising learning outcomes.

#### UN-LED INITIATIVES

The United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team, managed by OCHA, has recently added support for disaster preparedness to its disaster response role.

At the request of a government, it can evaluate national disaster preparedness and response capacity and plans. Areas addressed include the legal and institutional framework for disaster management, the response and coordination capacity of the emergency services and the effectiveness of early warning and public education. UNDAC has over 70 members and participating countries<sup>5</sup> and has conducted disaster preparedness missions in over 20 countries.

An independent review of UNDAC in 2011 found some of the missions to be of considerable value, particularly where there was a capacity to address recommendations from the report, but less so where long-term change was required (Groupe URD, 2011). An earlier review had noted that one of UNDAC's most significant impacts was the contribution it made to an enabling environment, 'open[ing] spaces for the NDMA that previously did not exist' (Nissen, 2009). In Philippines, Bhutan and Mongolia, there has been strong national ownership of the outcomes of the mission, which the review considered key to the mission's success:

*The most important factor determining whether a Disaster Response Preparedness mission will be successful in strengthening organizational capacity is ownership of the output from the mission from both the recipient Government, UN Country Team and other stakeholders at national level. (Nissen, 2009, p. iii)*

A second UN-led initiative is the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG), which was established to improve the quality and coordination of urban search and rescue efforts. Like UNDAC, INSARAG membership is open to all countries with an urban search and rescue function; it makes information and knowledge-sharing tools available through web-based portals. INSARAG also hosts ad-hoc lessons-learned seminars for its members, such as the one held after the Iran and Morocco Earthquakes in 2004, which was attended by representatives from over 30 countries.

Nepal invited support from INSARAG as part of a broader commitment to strengthening its disaster management capacity through the establishment of the Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium (see Box 1); INSARAG undertook an emergency response scoping mission in May 2011, on the basis of which a package of support has been agreed on to significantly strengthen Nepal's urban search and rescue capacity. Given the significant gaps in Nepal's preparedness capacity and its vulnerability to natural disasters, particularly earthquakes, this was considered by a member of the government responsible for emergency management as an extremely effective contribution to knowledge in a technical area in which Nepal had few options for developing its

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5. UNDAC member countries are those countries that financially support their participation in the UNDAC system through depositing funds with OCHA (in so-called "mission accounts") to cover the deployment costs of their national UNDAC members on UNDAC mission. UNDAC participating countries are those countries that provide experts to be part of the UNDAC team but do not cover their costs of deployment.



**There is a dearth of information about south-south capacity building between NDMAs, although interviews suggest that this can provide an important source of support for NDMAs.**



capacity (personal communication, Prasad Dhakal, Joint Secretary, Planning and Special Services Division, Ministry of Home Affairs, Nepal).

### SUPPORT FROM REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Capacity building of NDMAs in disaster risk management is a core activity of regional institutions. Several NDMA participants had attended training programmes hosted by SAARC – which they said had provided skills and knowledge far beyond what was available nationally as well as opportunities to network with peers. The SAARC Disaster Management Centre offers a comprehensive annual training and research programme which in 2013 included week-long courses hosted by member countries on a range of themes. Cooperation also occurs between regional organisations and international actors, for example the Pacific Emergency Management Training Advisory Group, which comprises the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission, OCHA, IFRC and the Asia Foundation and provides a forum for agencies involved in the design and delivery of emergency management training (Pacific Emergency Management Training Advisory Group, n.d.).

## 6.2 Peer learning

Interviewees spoke of a tendency for some members of the international humanitarian system to be overly paternalistic in their approaches to collaboration, which weakened relationships. This is of concern given that learning with others is a good way to expand knowledge beyond that available at the national level. Peer learning can provide an effective alternative, especially where there is a strong partnership based on shared values or culture.

### SOUTH–SOUTH INITIATIVES

There is a dearth of information about south–south capacity building between NDMAs, although interviews suggest that this can provide an important source of support for NDMAs (personal communication with Dody Ruswandi, BNPB and Dr Muzaffar Ahmad, Member, India NDMA). A recent example is a series of exchanges between Nigeria and Gambia to support Gambia’s launch of its NDMA in 2012, supporting capacity development in the areas of monitoring and evaluation, programme implementation, planning and search and rescue (NEMA, 2013). Included in the package of support was a proposal for Gambian NDMA staff to participate in a post-graduate programme in disaster management in Nigerian universities. While the context of disasters is different in Gambia than it is in Nigeria, there are clear benefits in partnership with its far larger West African neighbour. In addition to allowing Gambia to benefit from Nigeria’s broad experience and growing capacity in disaster management, bilateral cooperation can provide long-term support in disaster management and strengthen cooperation between the two governments in ways that may go beyond disaster management.

A second south–south example is a mentoring initiative of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, which is seeking to rapidly develop core government capacity in South Sudan. By ‘twinning’ regional experts with South Sudanese civil servants, efforts have been made to nurture a country-led and country-owned process.

Linked to this initiative has been a joint-agency effort to strengthen the capacity of South Sudan’s Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management and the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission. An independent study released in June 2013 concluded that there is reason for optimism:

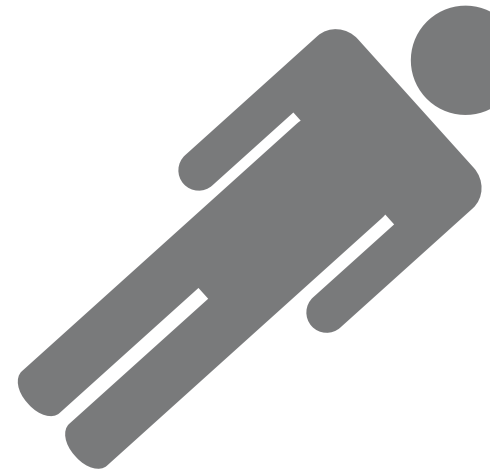
*After one-and-a-half years of implementation, the initiative is essentially still in its infancy – at least in its capacity as a large-scale laboratory in which to study this novel model of twinning-based capacity support. All in all, the study found the initiative to be very promising in terms of its positive impact, the level of ownership, its adaptability, and the flexibility and sustainability of the knowledge transfer taking place. (da Costa et al., 2013)*

#### OECD/DAC AND NON-OECD/DAC PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT

Cooperation between OECD/DAC and non-OECD/DAC NDMA is fairly common and spans a broad range of activities but is generally poorly documented. In one example, as part of its International Engagement Programme, New Zealand’s Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management has a strong engagement with five NDMA in the South Pacific to which it provides peer-to-peer partnership support. Efforts have been made to select team members with a good understanding of the partner country in order to ensure strong ties based on a shared understanding of the context. This approach provides a support network should New Zealand be affected by a disaster as well as increasing its domestic resilience and emergency management capability through learning from others (personal communication, Michael Hatfield, Development Manager for Disaster Risk Reduction, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade).

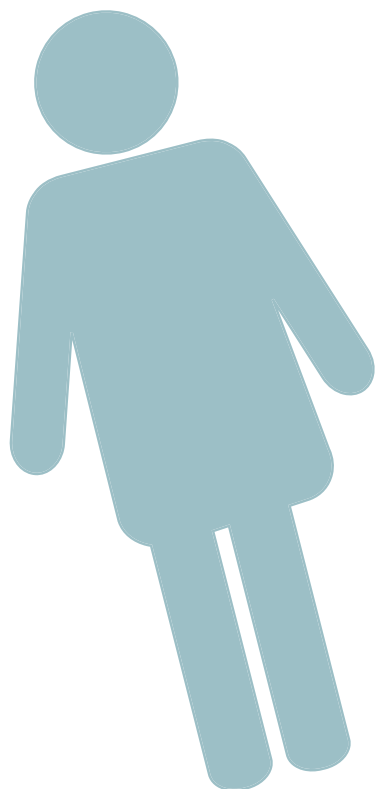
#### SUPPORT BY REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Fostering technical cooperation between NDMA is considered in the literature as a particular strength of regional institutions, and in many regions of the world where technical capacity is limited, there has been considerable success in pooling expertise. A study on the role of regional institutions in disaster risk management undertaken by the Brookings Institution noted that 10 out of a sample of 13 institutions actively fostered technical cooperation (Ferris and Petz, 2013). In the Pacific region, where NDMA capacity is very limited, the Pacific Disaster Risk Management Partnership Network provides significant support, building capacity through training programmes and developing trust and strengthening networks through annual meetings of NDMA and disaster organisations (Gero et al., 2013).



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Another example of regional collaboration is a series of exchanges facilitated by the Asian Disaster Reduction Centre. Since 2009 it has piloted a process of peer review amongst its members with the aim of developing their disaster risk reduction capacity by sharing information and strengthening relationships. After a country submits a report, it is visited by a review team consisting of two officers from member countries, one expert from Japan and a member of the target country. Participants prepare reports on the strengths and weaknesses of the host country's disaster management system and distribute them to the target country. In addition to the value of the reports themselves, participating in joint trips exposes NDMA staff to different contexts and ways of thinking and offers an opportunity for peer networking. Given the limited opportunities for exchanges of this nature, the Asian Disaster Reduction Centre offers NDMA a potentially important forum for learning.

### 6.3 Formal sharing of lessons learned

Documentation of one NDMA's learning can not only strengthen internal practice but also contribute to learning in other NDMA. While this review found limited information on ways in which NDMA shared knowledge, it did find two examples of dissemination of knowledge after a disaster:

- A regional workshop was organised by Indonesia's BNPB and the International Recovery Platform in 2009 to disseminate lessons from the 2006 Yogyakarta Earthquake recovery across South-East Asia. Policymakers, practitioners and academics from across the region attended the two-day event that identified constraints and gaps in recovery operations and explored scientific measures to address them in a more collaborative way. The workshop also included discussions on practical challenges and presentations of disaster and recovery lessons and experiences from Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam (International Recovery Platform, 2009).
- Workshops and other events were convened by ASEAN following its intervention after Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar. A web portal was also established which provided a database and e-library including a range of lessons-learned documents on the post-Nargis response and on the ASEAN model of intervention (ASEAN, 2008). This approach to collaboration was successfully brokered by a regional institution that continued to play a key role in implementation and learning. As a member of ASEAN and signatory to the Asian Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response, Myanmar agreed to the deployment of an emergency response team to conduct initial assessments. The success of the mechanism is evident in the access team members were given to the affected area, which was a precursor to access being given to the broader international humanitarian system. While the lessons documented from the response

make an important contribution to organising and sharing learning, one of the most important outcomes is the greater trust that has resulted between NDMAs and humanitarian organisations, which has strengthened subsequent humanitarian responses in the country.

## 6.4 Disaster management institutes

Knowledge can also be shared and capacity developed through government-mandated disaster management institutes which have wide-ranging responsibilities which may include some or all of capacity development, training, research, documentation and policy-creation for disaster management. In theory, such institutes bring together technical specialists, provide greater visibility for disasters within government and offer a focus for learning, although in practice the extent to which these benefits are realised depends on the resources they have available to them.

NDMA staff in India, Indonesia and Pakistan considered such institutes to play a key role in transferring knowledge from the national level to regional and district officials involved in disaster response, who have far less access to capacity development opportunities. In India, NIDM hosts and manages an ambitious training programme, publishes the biannual journal *Disaster and Development* and is responsible for the creation and dissemination of national policy and guidelines on disaster management.

## 6.5 E-learning initiatives

Web-based courses are increasingly used to facilitate learning on disaster management. A small number of NDMAs offer e-learning courses, which are a cost-effective way to provide basic information on disaster management to staff. India's NIDM offers an introductory six-week course on disaster management; when completed, it can be followed by eight specialised courses targeted at central and local government officials. Successful candidates receive certificates jointly issued by the NIDM and the World Bank.

“  
**Knowledge can also be shared and capacity developed through government mandated disaster management institutes. Web-based courses are also increasingly used to facilitate learning on disaster management.**  
 ”

## 6.6 Guidelines, codes of conduct and minimum standards

Codes of conduct and minimum standards can help disseminate lessons learned in an accessible way (see Table 6). A review of NDMA websites and interviews with study participants revealed the importance that many attach to this process. Indonesia's disaster policy guidelines are revised on the basis of a series of meetings chaired by BNPB to incorporate domestic lessons and new knowledge from the international humanitarian sector (personal communication, Dody Ruswandi, Deputy Director for Emergency Response BNPB, Indonesia). In Bangladesh, a series of guidelines for all levels

of government are used to help ministries, NGOs, disaster management committees and civil society implement disaster risk management (Shushilan, 2010). In India, a long-term effort has produced a comprehensive library of guidelines for responses to different types of disasters.

**Table 6. Examples of use of learning to develop guidelines and standards**

Country	Disaster policy	Focus of guidelines	Standards
Bangladesh	Draft National Plan for Disaster Management 2007-2015 (2010)	Gender and social inclusion, flood risk, reduction of desertification, damage needs assessment	Standing Orders on Disasters
India	Disaster Management Act (2005) National Policy on Disaster Management (2009) National Disaster Management Guidelines – Role of NGOs in Disaster Management (2010)	Preparedness for earthquakes, tsunamis, cyclones, floods, urban flooding, drought, landslides, nuclear and biological emergencies, chemical disasters (industrial accidents and terrorism); seismic safety and school safety	Minimum standards for Relief Standard Operating Procedures for Responding to Natural Disasters
Indonesia	National Disaster Management Plan 2010-2014 (2012) National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction 2010-2012 (2012)	Building urban resilience, community risk assessment, school safety, village safety, volunteer disaster management, planning, relief and evaluation	Standardisation of Disaster Data Logistics and Equipment standards Standard Operating Procedures for the NDMA Rapid Response Team
Pakistan	National Disaster Management Framework (2007) National Disaster Response Plan (2010) National Disaster Management Act (2010) National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy (2013) Monsoon Contingency Plan (2013)	Cyclone mitigation, flood mitigation, disaster risk management	None

Note: The review and documentation of NDMA guidelines and standards was undertaken as a desk-based exercise, drawing from NDMA's and associated research institutions' websites and knowledge portals. The majority of the documents reviewed were English-language originals or web-based translations. This review was supplemented by interviews with NDMA staff.

While such guidelines are an effective way of disseminating information, it is not easy to determine their success in shaping practice. While national policies have the greatest likelihood of contributing to changes in practice, they tend to be more static than guidelines, regulations and standards, and in the absence of a strategy for dissemination, they can be easily overlooked.

## 7. Enablers and inhibitors of NDMA learning

Theories of organisational learning provide a model of how information can be turned into knowledge which can be embedded in the way an organisation works. The success of this process depends on a range of factors, and the bar to success is generally high. The literature suggests that learning organisations must do some or all of the following:

*Provide continuous learning opportunities. Use learning to reach their goals. Link individual performance with organisational performance. Foster enquiry and dialogue, making it safe for people to share openly and take risks. Embrace creative tension as a source of energy and renewal. [Be] continuously aware of and interact with their environment. (Kerka, 1995)*

For NDMA as government entities, achievement of these ideals can be difficult. Barriers to governmental learning include conflicts between governmental units, citizen expectations, limited competition and tension between short-term politics and longer-term policy interests (Blindenbacher, 2010). While the profile of disaster management in many governments is improving, it often struggles to compete against higher-profile priorities; short-term changes are often favoured over longer-term systemic change.

However, there is also cause for optimism; unlike some other parts of government, the context within which NDMA work provides them with a compelling reason to embrace change if they want to adapt and succeed. Disasters can also be catalysts for change 'by creating new conditions and relationships within environmental, socioeconomic and political structures, institutions and organisations,' as was demonstrated by Indonesia's reform of disaster legislation and management structures after the Indian Ocean tsunami (Birkmann, 2008 pp.2). Disasters may also offer NDMA greater visibility. Where trust, resources and effective communication exist in an NDMA, along with a willingness and capacity to learn from practice and apply that learning to new contexts, there is the greatest likelihood for learning and improvement to be nurtured and for opportunities for change to be seized.

### 7.1 Generating knowledge

While NDMA aspire and are often mandated to generate learning through collective processes such as evaluations and AARs, only a few have the





**NDMAs extensively use formal processes of reflection to learn from disaster. These generate knowledge, disseminate new practices, increase understanding about disasters and raise the profile of NDMAs.**



resources and capacity to conduct them. Lack of capacity was most often cited as a constraint in the countries where national disaster management legislation was yet to be passed (as was the case for two of the NDMAs that participated in this study), and there was some optimism that a stronger legal framework would help leverage financial resources to address this. In these countries, the generation of knowledge from disaster response tended to be led by others, most often international organisations and particularly the UN, and this study has shown that these exercises successfully bridged some of the historic gaps between governments and the international humanitarian system. Despite this, there is little evidence publicly available that suggests such joint exercises have been held in the aftermath of humanitarian responses in any country with any degree of regularity

Non-OECD/DAC NDMAs with greater capacity fare better, and although only a minority appear to consistently undertake annual performance reviews or commission AARs, where these have occurred (such as in Indonesia, India and Pakistan), lessons have been incorporated into policy and practice. The reviews that followed the 2005 earthquake and 2010 floods in Pakistan and the NDMA's success in strengthening policy and resourcing by making recommendations in successive annual reports provide a compelling example of the potential leverage that evaluation can have.

NDMAs' use of formal processes of reflection to learn from disaster response is also encouraging. These are used extensively to generate knowledge and disseminate new practices, an approach that also increases understanding about disasters and raises the profile of the NDMA with line ministries and government departments.

### **SELECTING THE RIGHT TOOLS**

Like the international humanitarian system, NDMAs often have unrealistic expectations of the ability of evaluations and AARs to meet multiple requirements 'as a catch-all for accountability and learning' (Sandison, 2006). It is necessary to be clear about the purpose of an exercise and to select the correct tools and techniques to collect high-quality evidence. Given the small number of NDMA-commissioned reviews that are in the public domain, there is significant scope for NDMAs to more consistently review their responses and strike a balance between ensuring ownership of lessons learned (through AAR) and meeting the need for public accountability (through evaluation). The inclusion by the Pakistan NDMA of an external consultant on the 2010 Floods review team was believed to have offered broader perspectives to the learning process and provides a template for others.

### **COLLABORATION**

Although still inconsistent, the use of collaborative AARs to generate and share lessons learned from humanitarian response has helped bridge the gap between rhetoric and practice in partnership between NDMAs and the

international humanitarian system. To further harness the potential benefits of these exercises, greater efforts to be made by humanitarian country teams and NDMAs to use them more consistently after a humanitarian response. The current lack of joint humanitarian evaluations is disappointing and should be addressed by the IASC through its Joint Humanitarian Impact Evaluations initiative.

### BUILDING TRUST THROUGH SIMULATIONS

Trust is essential for maximising the potential for collaboration, particularly for NDMAs, which are often under political pressure to showcase success rather than failure. A culture of trust that permits challenge and change can be promoted by mock exercises or simulations, which were considered by many participants in the study as an effective means of generating lessons and strengthening practice. They allow an organisation or group of organisations to learn in a safe environment where mistakes can be made, and to scrutinise existing knowledge and practices and recommend course corrections. They can also help strengthen relationships between NDMAs and the international humanitarian system.

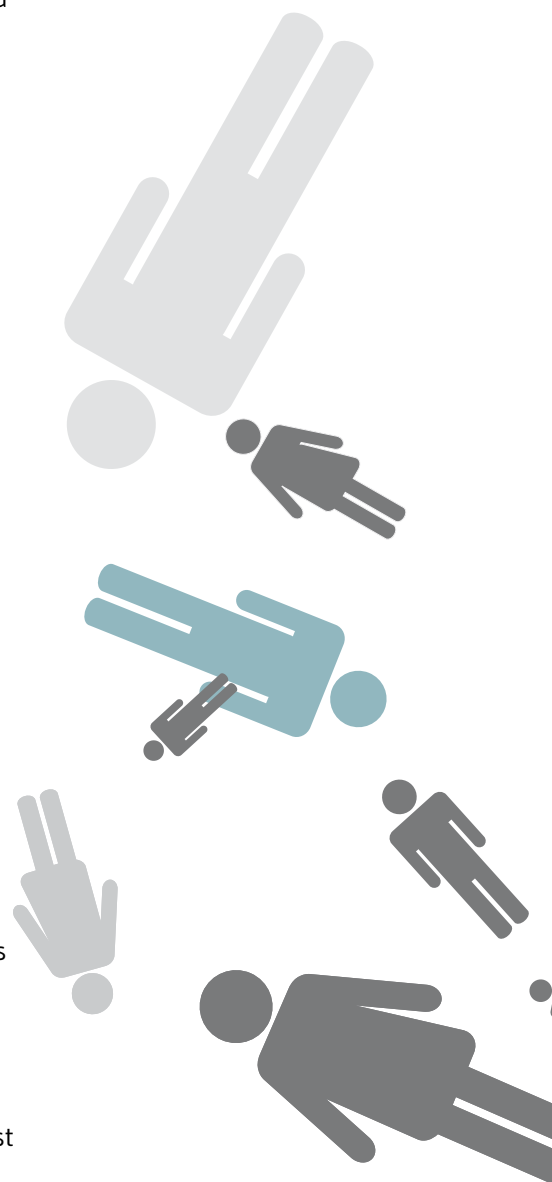
## 7.2 Organising knowledge

Interviewees representing NDMAs were in favour of national disaster management institutes responsible for the organisation of knowledge, and several noted the importance of national online repositories. Where these did not exist at the national level due to lack of resources, interviewees noted the value of regional repositories. Several acknowledged that there was a gap between the utility of these repositories in theory and their use in practice. Advances in information technology have led to far greater data capture from disasters, and NDMAs can find it difficult to identify, analyse and incorporate relevant knowledge into their ways of working. Even in high-capacity NDMAs, it is not uncommon for experts to be overwhelmed. The ALNAP Review of Humanitarian Action (Clarke and Ramalingam, 2008) noted the frequency with which learning initiatives in the international humanitarian system focus on documents, systems and products and fail to support operational learning. While a repository for knowledge can be a valid component of a broader learning mechanism, it is easy to undervalue the social aspect of learning; for evidence to be used, it needs to become part of a group's reality, and this goes beyond mechanistic approaches to storage. Both tacit knowledge which is retained in people's heads and explicit knowledge which can be written down and recorded need to be made available to others.

Capacity assessments are an important means by which NDMAs gain understanding of existing knowledge and skills and remaining gaps. While most study participants spoke frankly about the limitations in their capacity, of the NDMAs that participated in the research, only India's NIDM had undertaken



**A culture of trust that permits challenge and change can be promoted by mock exercises or simulations, which were considered by many participants in the study as an effective means of generating lessons and strengthening practice.**



an internal process of learning needs assessment. This is an area where both regional institutions and international organisations have successfully partnered with NDMA. Follow-through from identification of gaps to long-term partnership for skills development provides the best foundation for success.

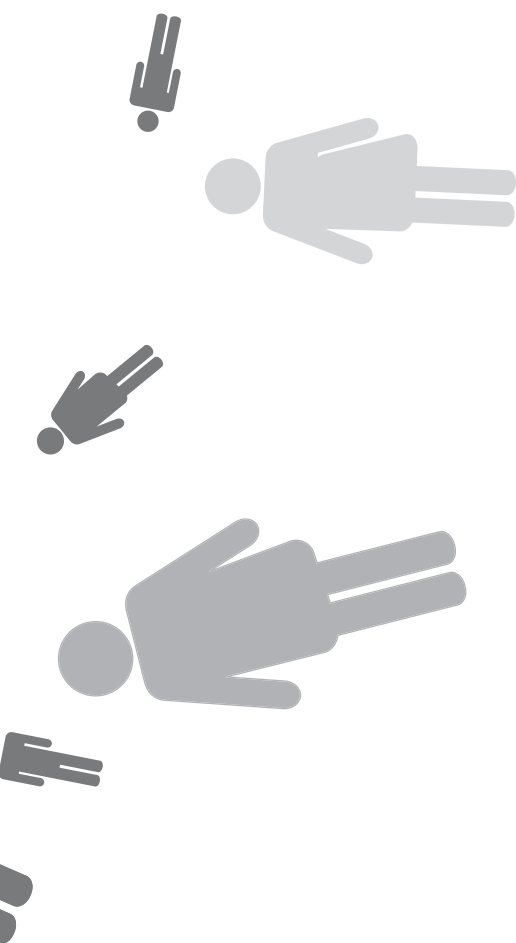
### 7.3 Sharing knowledge

Collective reflection and discussion is an important way for knowledge to be shared within NDMA. This requires both an opportunity for disaster management staff to meet together and the possibility of changing existing systems and ways of working. While some interviewees said that their NDMA sought to facilitate these processes through annual meetings or structured processes of reflection (also a means of generating knowledge), others highlighted the fractured nature of disaster management across different government departments or ministries and the implications this had for the process of learning. Poor communication can hamper learning as well as the dissemination and adoption of knowledge. A failure to formalise methods of dissemination often means that knowledge available at headquarters may be slow to trickle down to regional or district staff. Another challenge is the comparatively high rate of staff turnover: the government practice of rotating staff may interfere with long-term learning and make it difficult to maintain experience within NDMA, particularly in countries where a professional cadre of disaster management practitioners does not exist.

Despite the challenges, NDMA have taken measures to strengthen continuity and facilitate knowledge sharing. Peer support, with a particular focus on south–south knowledge transfer, was considered by participants in the study as being particularly effective, and country and regional initiatives to support knowledge sharing, such as BNPB’s conference after the Padang Earthquake and the initiative taken by ASEAN to highlight lessons from the response to Cyclone Nargis, provide innovative models of facilitated learning.

While there were few examples of bilateral support between NDMA, this type of partnership was considered by those who had been involved in it to be of most benefit to learning and improvement, with interviewees suggesting that a shared agenda and a commitment to long-term support were the most important reasons for this. Conversely, centralised external training courses were often found to be less useful as they were often poorly targeted.

Two attributes, a shared agenda and continuity of support, play an important role in the success of the institutional capacity development measures adopted by Bangladesh’s CDMP and the Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium (see box 1). For the latter, a shared agenda, holistic approach and multi-year commitment have been key to strengthening knowledge and partnership.



For many NDMAs, particularly those with limited resources and support, planning horizons are often too short, and dependency on annual budget cycles is incompatible with the need for multi-year institutional change. The struggle to compete with higher-profile government priorities often means that short-term changes are favoured over longer-term systemic change.

### Box 1. Successful collaborations for learning in Bangladesh and Nepal

#### **Case study 1:** the Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme in Bangladesh

In 2000, the Government of Bangladesh and the United Nations Development Programme began to explore opportunities to fast-track the transition from response and relief to comprehensive risk reduction, which resulted in the design of the Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme (CDMP) and its approval in November 2003. The goal of the CDMP was to reduce the nation's vulnerability to natural hazards by integrating disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation strategies into the development policy and planning of central, regional and local government agencies; thus, capacity building was a key part of the strategy. Efforts to achieve this were focused on enhancing the leadership and core business functions of several key entities, including the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management, Department of the Environment, Fire Service and Civil Defence, Geological Survey Department, Meteorological Service and Department of Agricultural Extension. The CDMP established numerous collaborations and training partnerships to enhance the technical capacity of government officials and has sought to develop capacity across all links of the response chain from national to local levels. To achieve sustainable change, efforts are being made to engage educational institutions, and by the end of the first phase, 14 national universities had agreed to participate (Luxbacher, 2011).

While the CDMP has had significant challenges, particularly in moving from theory into practice, with detractors questioning the slow pace with which it has had impact on reducing Bangladesh's vulnerability to disasters, as a collaborative initiative it has made a significant contribution to disaster management in Bangladesh. It also offers lessons on successful collaboration, one of the most important of which has been the importance of senior government and UN staff in leading the programme: their modelling of collaborative behaviour has been important for others in the programme.

A second lesson has been the value of a built-in process of review and evaluation. This has been instrumental in reviewing progress and making course corrections; it also gives the initiative credibility and serves as an advocacy tool to donors funding the programme. An independent evaluation was conducted at the end of the first phase of the programme (Russell N et al, 2009).

Including a broad a range of partners in the collaboration has not only yielded a diversity of experience and knowledge but has also helped the programme to be adopted nationally and to expand.

### **Case study 2: The Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium**

In May 2009, the Government of Nepal launched the comprehensive Nepal Disaster Risk Reduction Consortium (NRRC). The NRRC is a unique institutional arrangement bringing together financial institutions, development partners, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, and the UN in partnership with the Government of Nepal. It bridges the spectrum of development and humanitarian partners, uniting to support the Government of Nepal in developing a long-term action plan to reduce Nepal's vulnerability to natural disasters. Current assessments suggest that a major earthquake in Kathmandu would result in the deaths of 100,000 people and displace almost a million people. The NRRC has sought to work with the Ministry of Home Affairs and the broader government both to ensure the development of appropriate policy and to build the capacity of disaster management staff to prepare for and respond to a catastrophe of this magnitude.

This has required a range of capacity development tools that have included many of those documented in this study. Formal training programmes in technical areas, such as urban search and rescue delivered by INSARAG, have been complemented by broader engagement with national institutes and universities in order to mainstream disaster knowledge throughout the civil service in Nepal. Government engagement in disaster risk management (DRM) and ownership of the process has been encouraged through the preparation by each ministry of DRM mainstreaming plans in an approach that values engagement and incremental improvement over perfection.

In a country with significant capacity gaps in disaster response, an approach that builds DRM planning from the bottom up – that is, working with national-level training providers to allow change to happen at scale – and which seeks to match DRM plans with the capacity of the government to deliver them has potential to bring about significant change in the long term. There are already encouraging signs that the strategy is promoting ownership, which is essential if practice is to change across the government and be supported by policy in the long term.

Key lessons from the NRRC initiative on strengthening disaster management capacity in Nepal include the following:

- Fostering ownership through cross-ministerial engagement and capacity development has resulted in growing political support for disaster management.
- In a long-term process that prioritises building trust and engagement over the provision of technical capacity building, support has been provided to mentoring key government disaster management staff with a focus on one-on-one support.
- Beyond support to key staff, emphasis has been placed on influencing national curricula and providing support to universities and national educational institutions in order to influence civil service knowledge and attitudes more broadly. The focus on national-level learning allows it to be delivered at scale.
- NRRC has played an important role as a catalyst for bringing together the 13 government ministries with responsibilities for disaster management in Nepal. It has provided a home for knowledge, learning and capacity development and has supported the articulation of a common National Disaster Response Framework.

## 8. Conclusion

While the crucial role that NDMAs play in disaster management provides a compelling reason for investment in learning and improvement, structural and operational barriers remain to achieving this. As a government agency, an NDMA must compete for influence and resources with other governmental units and is subject to short-term political planning horizons and frequent staff rotations all of which have the potential to compromise organisational learning. However, the increasing global visibility of disasters and its potential for promoting policy and practice change can also provide important opportunities for NDMAs to compete for resources, strengthen their learning and improve their effectiveness.

NDMAs generate a considerable amount of knowledge through a range of methods including evaluation, AAR and formal and informal processes of reflection. However, many lack the resources to consistently apply these methods and as a consequence tacit knowledge is not systematically captured and analysed and is rarely shared within the NDMA. There are a few examples of NDMAs conducting capacity assessments and developing plans to address gaps in knowledge.

While some NDMAs have limited capacity for internal dissemination of learning, there has been a recent increase in the use of online repositories for organising information. Formal reflection provides another opportunity to share knowledge and learning with other government ministries and departments, and is important for strengthening understanding and support for disaster management.

Knowledge is increasingly both generated and shared through simulations, which have the dual advantage of strengthening trust and enable learning in a safe environment. Disaster policies and guidelines are another common means of incorporating lessons into practice.

NDMA performance is highly variable and often constrained by lack of resources; only the better-resourced NDMAs have a systematic approach to organisational learning.

Although the international humanitarian system has a poor record of coordinating its actions with NDMAs, efforts in this regard are improving, and a rich diversity of collaborative approaches to learning have been adopted by international organisations and regional institutions as well as bilaterally between governments. That is not to say that the international humanitarian system routinely deploys effective learning strategies, and many of the weaknesses in NDMA learning are shared by members of the humanitarian community. But shared solutions can be an important means of harnessing



additional resources and support, and of strengthening shared practice, which can itself lead to more effective joint responses.

## 8.1 Recommendations for NDMAs

Organisational learning happens in a variety of ways and in response to a range of stimuli; there is no single best approach, and no guarantee that learning will generate knowledge without established means to distil, analyse and apply the knowledge to specific problems. However, the steps recommended below could significantly strengthen NDMA learning.

### Priority recommendations

#### *STRENGTHEN NDMA CAPACITY FOR AFTER-ACTION REVIEW AND EVALUATION.*

While NDMAs use a range of approaches to promote learning and manage knowledge, opportunities are being missed to strengthen the effectiveness of learning from experience. AARs and evaluations undertaken after a disaster response can make a considerable contribution to learning, but they are used by only a small number of NDMAs and are often used inconsistently. Significant learning can come from even the most modest AAR, and greater uptake from NDMAs is recommended.

#### *USE THE POST-DISASTER WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY FOR LEGISLATIVE CHANGE.*

Disasters can offer NDMAs a window of opportunity to promote institutional or legislative change. Where trust, resources and effective communication exist in an NDMA and there is a willingness and capacity to learn from practice and apply that learning to new contexts, there is the greatest likelihood that learning and improvement will be nurtured and opportunities for change will be seized.

#### *USE LEARNING OUTPUTS TO INCREASE THE NDMA'S PROFILE WITHIN GOVERNMENT.*

The publication of NDMA evaluations and reviews has been used to identify weaknesses in disaster management policy and NDMA capacity and to lobby for additional resources for disaster management. Tracking progress against the recommendations made during processes of formal reflection with other government ministries and in annual reports can help ensure that these issues are followed up and help raise the profile of disaster management across government.

#### *ENGAGE IN PEER SUPPORT WITH OTHER NDMAS.*

The support that was afforded the greatest value by NDMA participants in the study was that of fellow NDMAs, either provided bilaterally or facilitated by regional institutions. There were perceived benefits to having a shared understanding of the context and of operational challenges. NDMAs placed a



high value on the longer-term planning horizons of this support, which offered the best opportunity to promote positive change. However, this type of support is poorly documented and would benefit from further study to more clearly identify current practices and opportunities for greater collaboration in the future.

## Additional recommendations

### *DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN AFTER-ACTION REVIEW AND HUMANITARIAN EVALUATION.*

AAR and evaluation have different strengths and weaknesses but have often been conflated by members of the international humanitarian system. NDMA should clarify their needs and choose the method that best meets them. In general terms, AARs promote learning, while evaluations promote accountability.

### *CONSIDER USING EXTERNAL EVALUATION STAFF.*

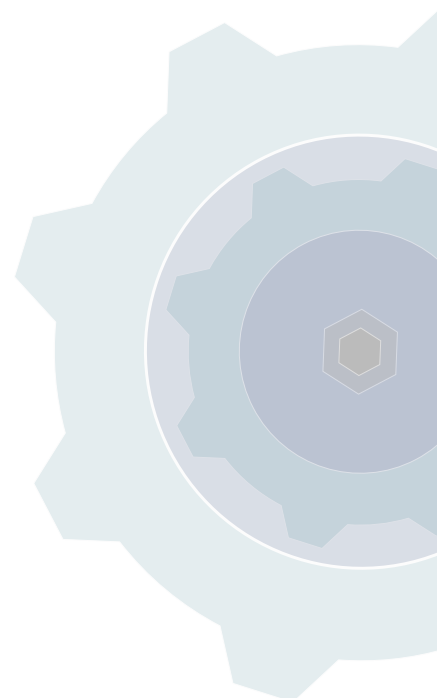
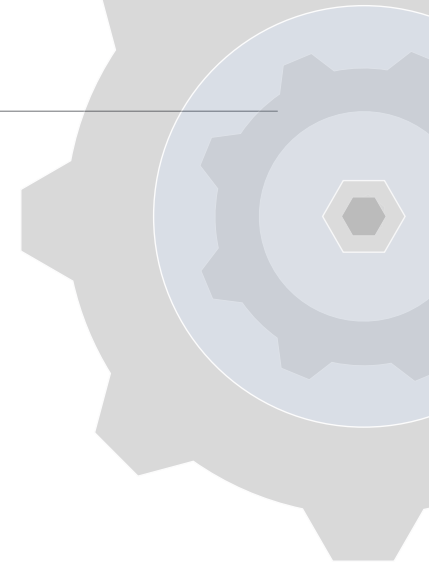
While NDMA staff most reviews internally, Pakistan's experience using an independent evaluator was considered to have offered the benefits of providing fresh perspective and increasing the credibility of the review, and thus adding value to the review process. NDMA should expand their use of external evaluators to better understand the potential benefits of independent analysis.

### *ASSESS CAPACITY FIRST, THEN CHOOSE APPROPRIATE TRAINING.*

Training should be founded on a rigorous capacity assessment and clearly linked to staff and organisational development objectives. It should be offered in the appropriate language and at an appropriate level. Participation, especially in international training programmes, should be driven solely by training needs and not offered as a reward, a perk for seniority, or a benefit that must be shared equitably. Every training event should be accompanied by a plan for its use in the workplace and/or dissemination to NDMA colleagues.

### *USE SIMULATIONS TO STRENGTHEN PRACTICE AND BUILD MUTUAL TRUST.*

Simulations are increasingly recognised by NDMA and the international humanitarian community as a highly effective way of strengthening preparedness and building capacity. They offer a safe environment in which to learn and make mistakes. They also provide an excellent opportunity to build trust and improve relationships between diverse members of the humanitarian community.





## 8.2 Recommendations for international organisations and regional institutions

Acknowledgement by NDMAs of barriers to learning provides an entry point for international organisations and regional institutions to support NDMA learning and contribute to capacity development. The steps recommended below could significantly strengthen that collaboration.

### Priority recommendations

#### *STRENGTHEN LINKS BETWEEN NDMAS AND THE INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM.*

Despite acknowledgement of the importance of strong links between host governments and the international humanitarian system, and the growth of initiatives to foster dialogue between national and international partners, there is often a failure to build effective partnerships with host governments and specifically with NDMAs. Tangible actions should be taken globally and at the country level to facilitate closer working relationships with NDMAs.

#### *PROMOTE JOINT HUMANITARIAN EVALUATION.*

This study failed to identify examples of NDMAs partnering with international humanitarian organisations for humanitarian evaluation (as opposed to AARs where performance has been better), despite past IASC initiatives to explore this. Joint humanitarian evaluation is consistent with the aims of the Transformative Agenda and could provide invaluable lessons for humanitarian response as well as strengthening relationships. A pilot joint humanitarian evaluation should be undertaken with a view to promoting wider uptake.

#### *ESTABLISH LONG-TERM STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS THAT DEVELOP CAPACITY AND ENHANCE VISIBILITY.*

The profile of NDMAs within their governments critically affects their ability to harness resources and promote legislative change. The Bangladesh and Nepal case studies show how capacity development and partnership with government in disaster management can both strengthen practice and help raise the NDMA's profile.

## Additional recommendations

### *STRENGTHEN COLLABORATION BETWEEN NDMAS AND HUMANITARIAN COUNTRY TEAMS ON AFTER-ACTION REVIEW.*

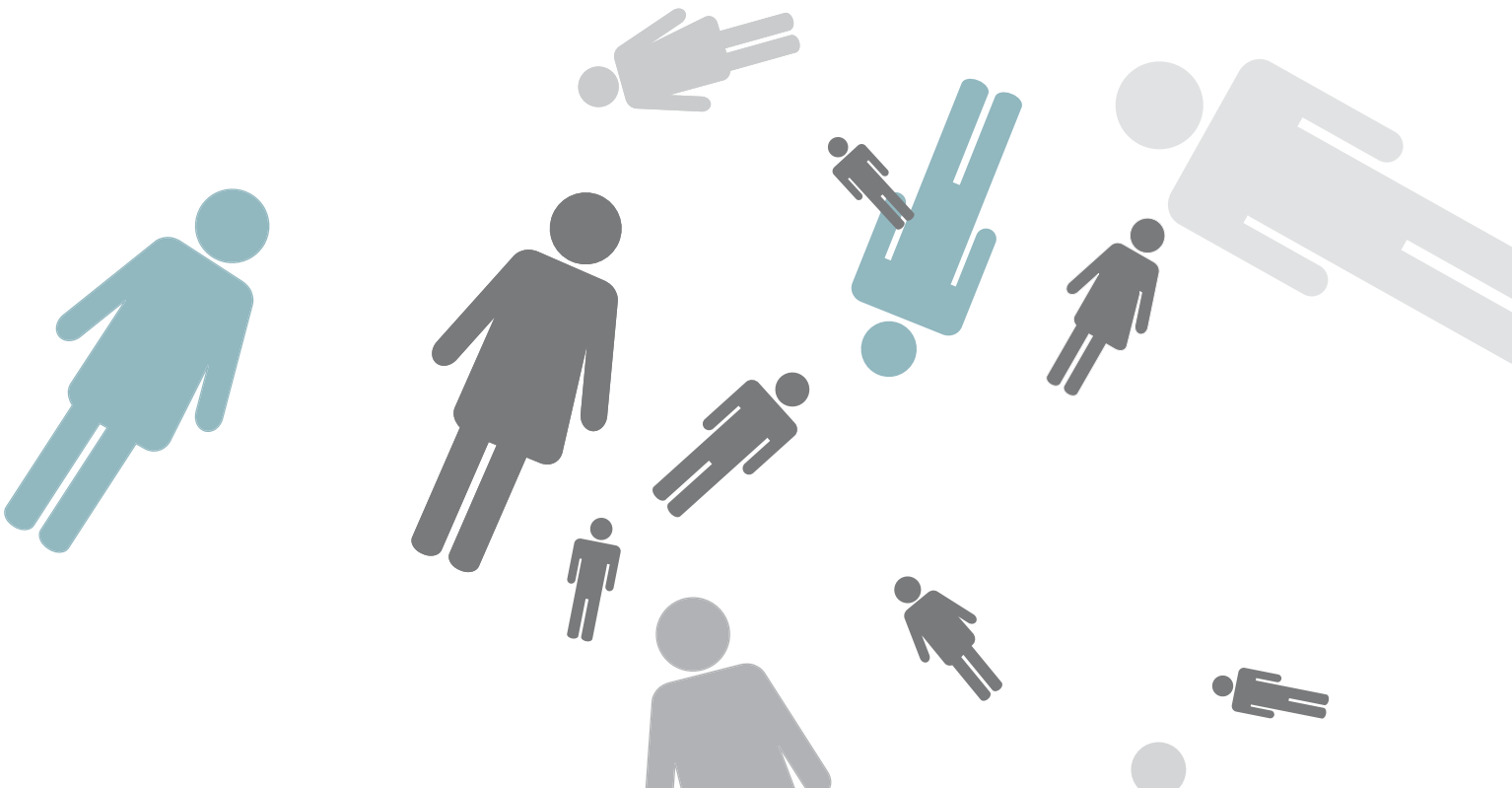
AARs that have been undertaken collaboratively between NDMAs and members of the national and international humanitarian community have filled an important learning gap, but they happen infrequently. There is significant scope for humanitarian country teams to partner with NDMAs to make such events more routine for large and medium-scale disasters. Their potential value in identifying ways to strengthen humanitarian response and partnership far outweighs any potential costs.

### *DEVELOP PARTNERSHIPS BASED ON MUTUAL TRUST AND RESPECT.*

This study identified the potential support that collaboration offers to NDMA learning, but it also found that the strongest partnerships stem from shared values and are based on trust and mutual respect. The capacity of many NDMAs to respond to humanitarian crises has increased significantly in recent years, and it is important that partnerships draw on an analysis of the national context within which the NDMA works and recognise its capacities as well as its limitations.

### *CONTINUE TO DRAW LESSONS FROM NDMA INSTITUTION-BUILDING INITIATIVES.*

There is a growing number of holistic, multi-stakeholder approaches to institutional strengthening of NDMAs (including in Nepal, Bangladesh and South Sudan) which can offer significant learning about strengthening institutional capacity and learning. Documenting and disseminating lessons from these initiatives should be prioritised; a comparative analysis could also yield important lessons for future institutional support.



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## Annex 1: Research questions and methodology

### Research questions

The research questions were:

- What mechanisms are open to state actors seeking to learn from and improve their disaster and humanitarian response practice?
- What models of collaboration exist to support learning?
- What is working, what are the challenges and how can learning be strengthened?

### METHODS

Selection of national disaster management authorities and entities  
The study sought to target two to three staff from each of five NDMA's chosen to represent the range of existing capacities. NDMA's were initially selected based on their prior engagement with ALNAP to offer the best possibility of participation in the research. From this pool, five non-OECD/DAC NDMA's and one OECD/DAC NDMA were chosen as broadly representative of the diverse capacities of NDMA's. Four were mandated by national legislation on disaster management (India, Indonesia, New Zealand and Pakistan) and two were not (Kenya and Nepal). The predilection for Asian NDMA's reflected both their willingness to participate and their capacity to engage with the study. New Zealand's Civil Defence and Emergency Management was selected to explore the potential for comparison between OECD/DAC and non-OECD/DAC NDMA capacity and approaches to learning and improvement.

In addition to NDMA staff, individuals in organisations with a mandate for or history of collaborating with NDMA's on learning and improvement were also selected for interviews.

### INTERVIEW DEVELOPMENT AND PROCESS

Two lists of questions, one for NDMA's and one for other organisations, were used to guide interviews. The questions sought to explore the following:

- how NDMA's are structured to learn
- the methods used for learning
- impediments to learning
- collaboration for learning
- lessons from past practice.

Open-ended questions were used throughout the interviews, and follow-up was guided by the relevance of the responses to the research questions and the opportunity to gather examples of NDMA practice.

### CROSS-CHECKING OF INFORMATION

The proposed approach to cross-checking information within the NDMAs was to target several members of each agency; this was also considered to offer the greatest opportunity for follow-up on specific areas of interest. Ultimately it was not possible to achieve this in practice, as NDMAs tended to have a single representative responsible for external liaison. The use of a standard interview template permitted triangulation across NDMAs and highlighted the differences in their approaches and capacities.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of relevant literature was undertaken to complement the interviews. NDMA websites and disaster management institutes were selected for review in addition to a broader web-based search of relevant documents which included the following:

- NDMA-authored reviews, annual reports and technical standards
- outputs from collaborations between regional institutions and NDMAs, including peer-review reports, capacity assessments and training reports
- outputs from collaborations between international organisations and NDMAs, including review reports, lessons learned, assessment mission reports and progress reports
- academic studies on learning and improvement in disaster management and studies on specific regional, international and national initiatives

### STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

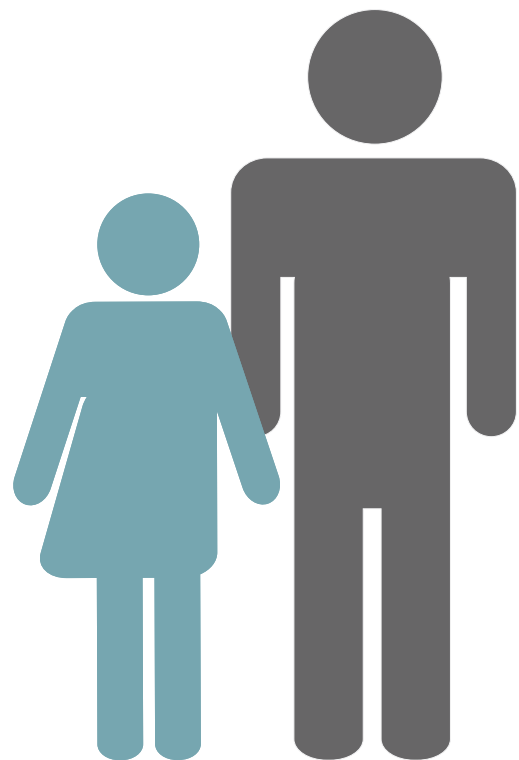
The analytic structure that was used in this paper, and the assumptions about organisational learning, were based on the approach taken by the international humanitarian system. This meant that the tools and approaches that were considered (and that were asked about in interviews) were primarily those used by international organisations, although they were also found to have resonance with some of the NDMAs that participated in the research.

The decision to base the structure of the study on the knowledge management cycle was taken because it offered a framework to present the findings clearly rather than being a reflection of how NDMAs approach learning and improvement. The research revealed evidence that at least one NDMA had adopted a similar framework, which provided a common reference.

### LIMITATIONS

Eliciting engagement of NDMAs in the study was a challenge; 12 NDMAs were invited to participate, and while 10 registered interest, only 6 participated. While efforts were made to contact several members of each NDMA, the tendency was for each to have a single staff member responsible for external communications, and usually that person participated in the ALNAP study. While a single, central contact was helpful, it did limit the depth of analysis. Interviewees' levels of knowledge and candour also differed significantly. While there was the potential

for NDMAs in South America to make a significant contribution, the limited contacts which ALNAP had and the lack of relevant language skills meant that participation there was precluded. There was a tendency for participants to speak more freely about successful learning initiatives or plans for the future than about weaknesses or past failures, although the candour with which several of the participants approached the research was of great benefit.



## Annex 2: Research participants

### MANAGEMENT AUTHORITIES

- Mr Olekina Koitamet, Deputy Coordinator, Crisis Response Centre, Kenya
- Mr Dody Ruswandi, Deputy Director for Emergency Response, Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Indonesia
- Mr Prasad Dhakal, Joint Secretary, Planning and Special Services Division, Ministry of Home Affairs, Nepal
- Mr Bruno Maestracci, Interministerial Operational Crisis Management Centre, France
- Mr Muhammad Idrees Mahsud, Director, Pakistan NDMA
- Mr Michael Hatfield, Development Manager for Disaster Risk Reduction, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Dr Muzaffar Ahmad, Member, India NDMA

### INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

- Ms Moira Reddick, Coordinator, Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium
- Ms Jenty Kirsch-Wood, Head, Disaster Risk Management Unit, United Nations Development Programme Nepal
- Mr David Hockaday, Global Field Project Manager, Emergency Capacity Building Project
- Mr Charles Antoine Hoffman, Disaster Response Dialogue Executive Coordinator, IFRC
- Mr Scott Green, Chief of Evaluations, Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UN

### RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS

- Ms Alice Obrecht, Research and Programmes Officer, Humanitarian Futures Programme, Kings College, London
- Mr Kim Scriven, Manager, Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF)

### INTER-GOVERNMENTAL AND REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS

- Mr Robert Francis Garcia, Advisor for Training and Knowledge Management Systems, ASEAN Partnership Group, Asian Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response
- Mr Said Faisal, Executive Director, Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management, ASEAN

## Annex 3: Terms of reference

### TERMS OF REFERENCE – MAY 2013

Learning and improvement by governments affected by humanitarian crises - An ALNAP Study

#### BACKGROUND

ALNAP has been working for a number of years to increase links with National Disaster Management Authorities (NDMAs), and to better understand the relationship between affected states and the international system. It has done this primarily by conducting research and convening representatives from NDMAs at ALNAP Meetings. To date this work has looked broadly at the relationship between governing authorities in affected states and the international humanitarian system, and what efforts can be made to increase the quality of relationships between the two groups of actors, both during emergencies and on an ongoing basis.

Most recently, ALNAP convened a small number of representatives from NDMAs and other relevant bodies to discuss the issue of learning and improvement by host governments, as part of a larger ALNAP meeting on Evidence and Knowledge in Humanitarian Action. The closed session provided an opportunity for governments to share examples of learning – including debriefing, simulation, evaluation and training. Participants also discussed some of the challenges to greater learning and knowledge sharing, and the translation of learning into changes in practice. These included resources constraints, the political nature of crises and disasters, a lack of trust, and the tensions between learning and accountability.

The briefing note for this session highlighted both the evidential and theoretical challenges of understanding how governments undertake and internalise learning around humanitarian issues, stemming both from a paucity of examples of learning by governments in this area, and wider theoretical challenges of unpacking the ‘black box’ of governmental learning.

#### RATIONALE

The rationale for this work stems from the experience of the ALNAP network and others. We currently have few examples of evaluative exercises undertaken or commissioned by affected states (for instance as captured by ALNAP’s Evaluation Library), and there is only a limited understanding within the international system of the strategies and specific activities being undertaken by governments in disaster-prone developing states. At the same time there are an increasing number of efforts, initiated by states, regional bodies, and international organisations, aimed at increasing the capacities and engagement of governments. In addition, research has noted that individual governments are often in the process of adjusting their structures following lessons learnt

from previous disasters (Harvey, 2009). This point was reinforced by the most recent ALNAP State of the Humanitarian System report, which noted that a growing number of aid-recipient states, particularly in Asia and Latin America, are establishing or strengthening national systems to manage response to natural disasters, and increasingly insist on engaging with international aid actors on their own terms.

### AIM

The aim of this research is to describe the range of activities being undertaken by NDMAs and other state actors in relation to learning and improvement around humanitarian response activities, discuss the challenges impeding greater learning and utilisation, and make recommendations as to what different actors (i.e. NDMAs, the UN, NGOs, donors, regional actors) can do to foster improved learning and where appropriate greater collaboration.

### SCOPE

The scope of the research will broadly follow that of ALNAP's other work in this area, as outlined in the document "ALNAP's work with NDMAs – key scoping questions". This aims to ensure that the work remains concise and bounded, but recognises that there may be a range of examples and experience of interest that we would not wish to exclude. ALNAP will keep an open mind to the kinds of learning and the type of actors involved. This might include:

- Formal exercises to gather learning and experiences, or to reflect on practice. For instance evaluations, AARs, structured reflections etc.
- Other formal exercises to exchange knowledge and practice, including structured training, courses, exchanges etc.
- Informal systems for the exchange of knowledge and for reflection, and the exchange of tacit knowledge

In terms of the actors involved in these activities we are primarily interested in learning within individual NDMAs. We would also hope to explore:

- The exchange of knowledge and learning between government actors (including the military involved in humanitarian response) and the international humanitarian system
- Learning across NDMA, or other relevant bodies
- Comparative examples from northern NDMAs or the humanitarian system

Although we are interested in instances where there has been interaction between civilian and military actors in this area, we are not explicitly looking at learning in relation to civil-military coordination.

The research may wish to include a discussion of the particular evidential and theoretical challenges to learning by governments. In particular this might relate to the relative paucity of documented and/or publically available examples of learning by governments in relation to humanitarian response, as well as the wider theoretical challenges of understanding how learning takes



place and is utilised within governments.

Finally, to the extent possible the research should recognise the diversity (both internally and in comparison to each other) of the various actors comprising 'government', the state and NDMAs. However, it is envisaged that the research will focus primarily on national level structures, with only limited reference to (the particular challenges of capturing and promoting learning in) provincial and local structures, or regional level mechanisms such as ASEAN or the SAARC DMC.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The broad questions that this research will seek to answer include:

1. What mechanisms are open to state actors seeking to learn from and improve their disaster and humanitarian response practice? (What are others doing - i.e. northern NDMAs, international humanitarian actors?)
2. What mechanisms for learning and improvement are currently being employed by relevant state authorities/NDMAs?
3. In what ways are national governments and elements of the international humanitarian system collaborating to foster learning and improve response?
4. What is working?
5. What are the major challenges impeding learning and improvement efforts by governments?

### PROCESS

The research will likely include a combination of literature review and key informant interviews, for example:

- A review of the existent literature on the role of the affected state
- A wider search for literature and grey literature examples of learning activities undertaken by NDMAs and other relevant organisations
- A limited review of relevant literature on learning by governments
- Key informant interviews with a small number of relevant humanitarian actors
- Key informant interviews with individuals in ALNAP's networks of NDMA representatives (and potentially others)
- Given the preparatory work that has been undertaken by ALNAP, a number of inputs will be provided at the project outset, in order to assist the consultant.

This will include:

- existing published and internal project outputs
- potential interview lists (for both NDMAs and humanitarian stakeholders)
- a sourced list of potential examples
- a partial literature review

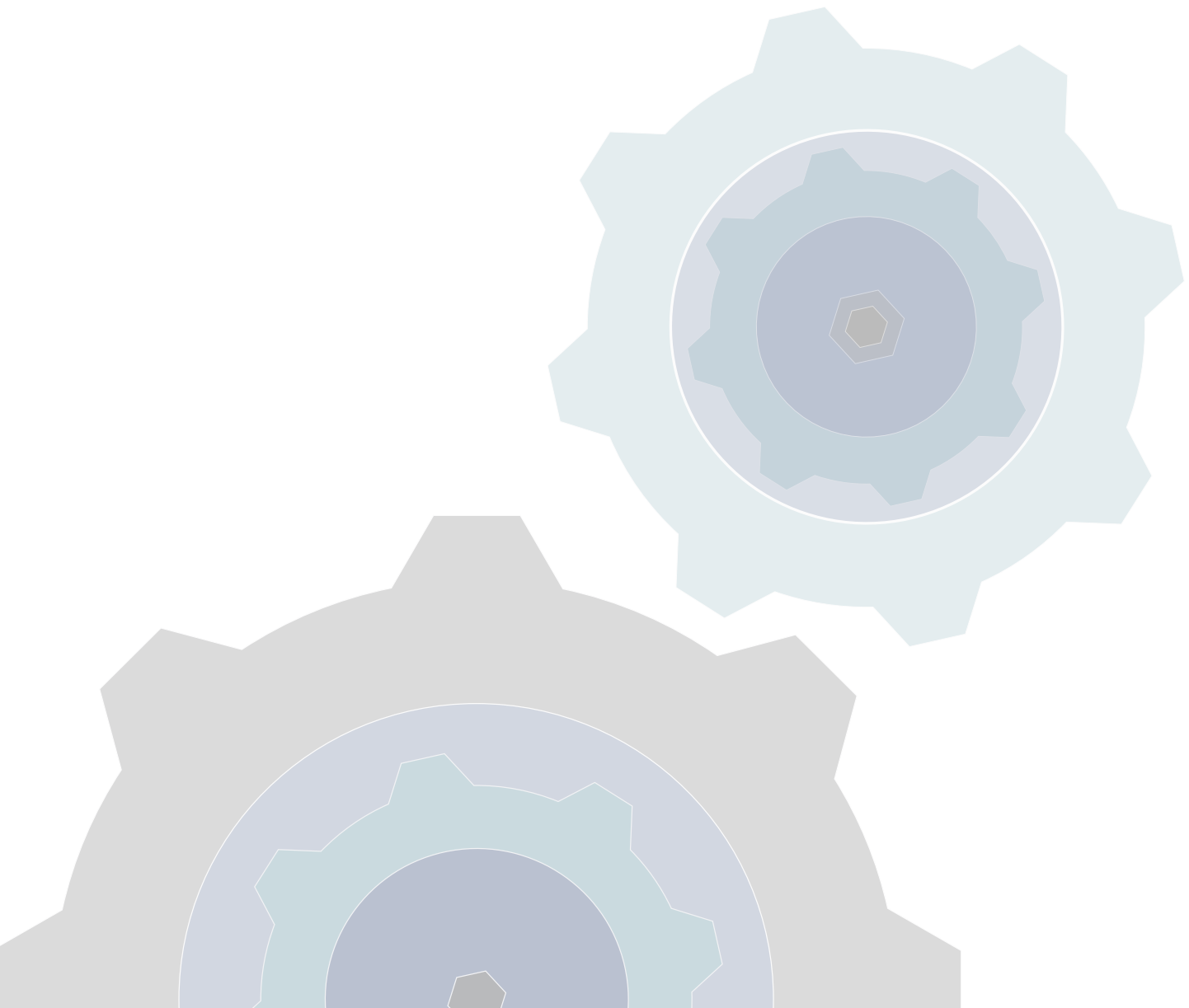
The consultant will submit a first draft to the ALNAP secretariat for review and comments (by the Secretariat and a small Advisory Review Group), before completing a final report, which will be edited via the Secretariat prior to publication.

#### EXPECTED OUTPUTS

- a first draft report
- a final, fully referenced report of approximately 15-25 thousand words
- a PowerPoint presentation summarising the report, produced in conjunction with the ALNAP communications team
- a blog post to coincide with the launch of the report
- participation in a report launch

#### TIMING

It is expected that the research for this study will be completed in July 2013, with a final report published by ALNAP in the autumn. Initial scoping discussions will take place in June 2012, between the secretariat and consultant.





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ALNAP would like to acknowledge the financial support of  
USAID in carrying out this initiative.

