

A NETWORKED RESPONSE?

Exploring national humanitarian networks in Asia

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An ALNAP and ADRRN research collaboration

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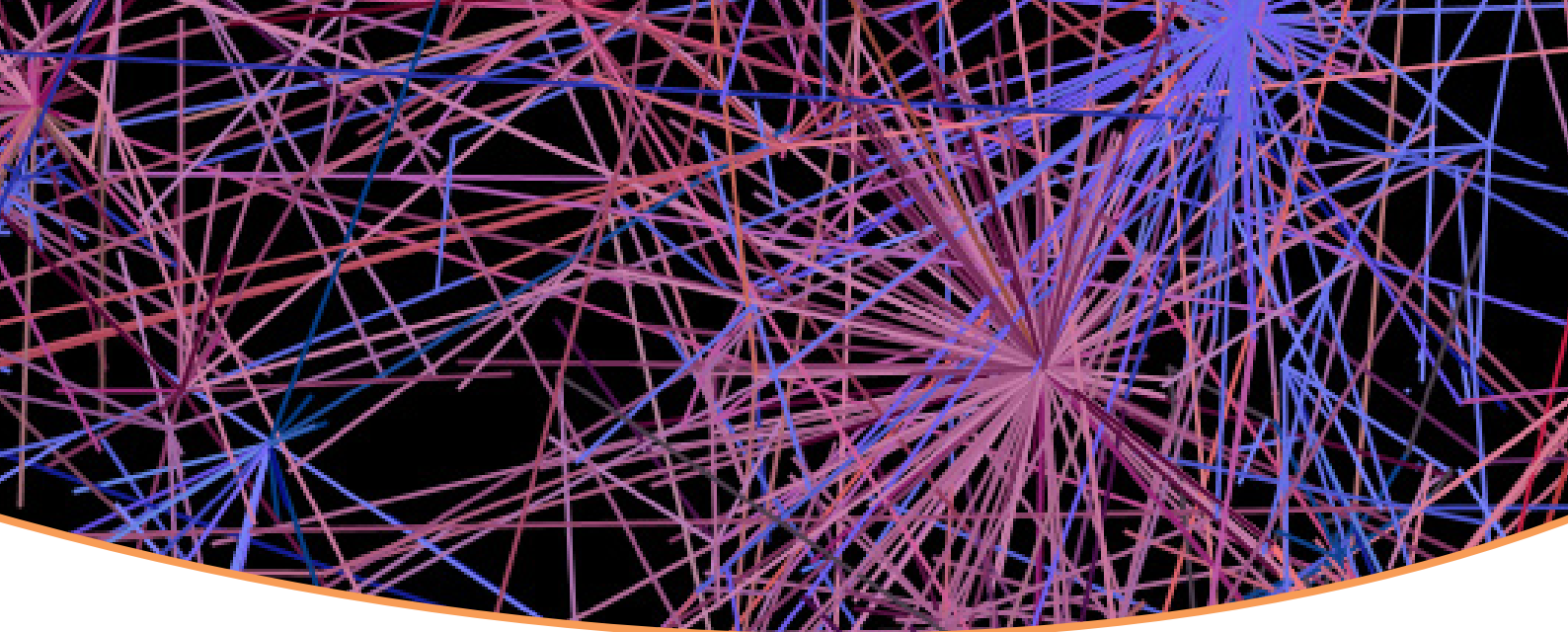


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1. Introduction

Networks are an increasingly prominent feature of the modern world. In the humanitarian system – characterised as it is by interdependent relationships between autonomous actors and the lack of any central authority or agreed hierarchy – they can be found organising collective action and collaboration in a multitude of settings.

Much time and energy has been invested in inter-organisational collaborations, and the system has invested heavily in efforts at more coordinated emergency response. As practitioners and policymakers seek to shape the system and improve its collective performance, interest has also grown in the role that local and national actors can play in response and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), with calls for new models for structuring the relationship between national Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and international humanitarian actors. Much has been written about the successes and failures of the humanitarian system in seeking to develop structures to respond to emergencies in a coordinated manner. International NGOs are also increasingly documenting their experiences of collaboration and partnership, and strengthening the way they work with one another. Despite this, beyond the bilateral partnership models favoured (or imposed) by international agencies, little is known about how national actors independently approach collaboration or use networks. The core aim of this research is to improve the humanitarian systems' understanding of how national actors are currently engaged in networks. It is focused on Asia and draws on case study research completed in the Philippines, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. The research seeks to document the current nature of networking at the national level, to capture instances of achievement, attempting to draw conclusions about the factors influencing the success of national level networks.

The research is the product of a collaboration between two networks in the humanitarian system: the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP), which brings together a range of humanitarian agencies, and the Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network (ADRRN), which brings together NGOs based in Asia. Both networks were interested in finding practical ways to engage with NGOs operating at the national level, and to improve links between national, regional, and international networks. There was also a realisation that relatively little was formally known about how networks operate at the national level. A approach based on case studies was used to provide

empirical evidence on active networks, capturing their forms and functions, and their perceived successes. More detail on the case study methodology can be found in annex.

Existing theoretical approaches have been used to inform the categorisation and analysis of the information gathered; in particular using a modified version of the Network Functions Approach (NFA). The idea of thinking about networks in terms of their functions has been used in a number of similar efforts to look predominantly at research and policy networks. The analysis also draws on other theoretical approaches, including from social network analysis and network governance theory, but is driven by the data gathered through the cases studies, rather than any given theoretical approach to networks.

The study is structured as follows: the first section briefly outlines the increasing importance of considering the role of local and national organisation in humanitarian response. The rise of networks as a prominent form of organisation is then considered, along with a discussion of the definition and scope of networks in this study. Networks in the humanitarian system are then discussed. Some simple, established conceptual tools for thinking about networks are presented, and provide a basis for analysis in the research. This is followed by the case studies, first identified individually then analysed comparatively. The networks are described in relation to the form they take and the functions they perform. Their relationship with formal coordination structures and other networks are also discussed. Conclusions are drawn regarding the overall picture for national networks based on the research, including the key successes and remaining challenges. This final section outlines eight success factors that have been identified, which it is hoped will prove useful for those working in and supporting national humanitarian networks.

Why national and local actors?

This research is primarily concerned with humanitarian networks operating at the national level, and national and local actors engaged in humanitarian response and DRR – even if it is hoped that the findings may have a wider application. Before exploring the nature of networks in more detail, it is important to outline why these actors are important, and place them in the wider humanitarian system. Following the joint evaluation of the Tsunami Response, one of the central recommendations called for a fundamental reorientation of the humanitarian system, from supplying aid internationally to supporting and facilitating communities' own relief and recovery priorities – with national and local organisations at the heart of this (Cosgrave 2007). In many emergencies, organisations based in the affected area play a vital role: as first responders and in accessing populations beyond the reach of international actors (whether due to logistical or security constraints). By definition, they will remain in a context through recovery and beyond, and they themselves argue that their proximity to

affected communities improves their ability to provide relevant and appropriate response.

Despite this, and nearly a decade after the tsunami, the humanitarian system has made little progress in this area, with estimates from 2009 suggesting that as little as 1.9% of government funds to NGOs flow to organisations headquartered in affected countries (GHA 2011)¹. Although, the drivers shaping the future of humanitarian response highlight the need for investment in local actors as fundamental to building resilience, systemic and bureaucratic impediments remain.

¹ A challenging figure to estimate, this is the most recent year for which a specific figure is available. The 2012 GHA report does, however, note the positive impact of pooled funding at the national level (GHA 2012)

A number of international actors are increasingly looking for ways to engage with the challenges of supporting local and national actors. International NGOs are exploring new models of support, which sustainably build the capacity of the national NGO partners, including through new partnerships and collaborations (Nightingale 2012; Cairns 2012). The Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement has been engaged with many of these issues for decades. Donors are also paying increasing attention to how they can provide financial support directly at the national level, and pushing for wider policy change to support resilience (Ashdown 2011; GHA 2012).

Despite the growing arguments for investment in and support to actors in affected states, comparatively little is known about the nature and impact of domestic response, whether by state or non-state actors. In shedding light on the ways national actors are collaborating and engaging in networks, it is hoped that this work can contribute to wider debates about the role of national action in humanitarian response.

Why networks?

This section charts the rise of networks as an important form of social organisation and exchange, particularly in relation to discussions about the nature of the humanitarian system and the range of collaborative relationships that take place within it. It also seeks to explore the variety of ways networks have been defined in the literature, using this to outline the scope of the networks considered in this study.

The rise of networks

Networks appear to be the ubiquitous form of organisation of the 21st century, and have been described as 'the intellectual centrepiece for a new era' (Kahler 2009). Leading sociologist Manuel Castells (Castells, 1996; 2004), tracing the growth of the 'network society', has outlined the global changes that characterise their rise and argues that, by harnessing new communication technologies, networks create global links and form the structural basis of globalisation, with networked organisations (private, public and civil) outperforming traditional

hierarchies and rigid bureaucracies. Fundamentally for Castells, power no longer resides in institutions, but is instead located in the networks that structure society, and the 'switchers' connecting or disconnecting networks from each other. As networks have increased in prominence, scholars and practitioners have made a variety of claims as to their potential to influence changes at various levels of society. Such claims include:

- The ability of networks to increase trusts between actors (Uzzi 1997)
- Their role in building social capital among individuals and organisational (Putnam 2001)
- Their potential to help manage uncertainties and complexity (Koppenjan & Klijn 2004)
- The role of networks in fostering innovation (Tidd & Bessant 2011; Owen-Smith & Powell 2004)
- Their role in spreading and diffusing new ideas and technologies (Rogers 2010)

These trends and properties extend beyond any single network, to describe shifts in the nature of social relations more generally, yet they remain extremely relevant, particularly as they explain the changing behaviour of states, businesses and civil society. For the humanitarian system, existing as a subset of wider international society, they have particularly important implications given the structure of the system and the nature of relationships within it.

Defining networks

Despite (or perhaps because of) the prominence of networks and the interest surrounding them, usefully defining what constitutes a network remains a challenging task. Most simply, a network is any collection of interconnected actors or objects, yet such a broad definition (which would include social, technological, and biological networks) offers little as an analytical tool, and limiting the scope of inquiry is a requisite first step in reaching an understanding of what constitutes a network. Even then, focusing just on social networks between actors, the wide use of the term as a metaphor for a range of relationships risks devaluing its utility (Ramalingam 2011), with labels such as partnership, network, collaboration, and cooperation used synonymously and interchangeably, further fuelling confusion (Kim 2006).

Many attempts to define networks start from recognition that, as a way of organising interactions, they are distinct from other forms, in particular markets or hierarchies (Powell 1990). Beyond the distinction between networks and other forms of organisation, Powell stresses the horizontal patterns of exchange between actors, independent flows of resources, and two-way communication (ibid). Looking more broadly at the literature, a series of recurrent features can be identified (Provan et al. 2007). These include the implicit and open-ended contracts between autonomous actors (Jones et al. 1997), the strategic, long-term nature of

relationships (Gerlach 1992), or the rise of interdependencies resting on mutual obligations, expectations, reputations, and interests (Larson 1992).

Synthesising across definitions, we can see a number of common features marking out networks from other forms of interaction or collaboration. These include: **the presence of dynamic, ongoing mutually beneficial relationships between actors; the multidimensional nature of the exchanges that take place; and the (more or less) voluntary nature of the links between autonomous actors. Finally, as will be discussed in more detail below, a distinct group of recognisable functions performed by networks can also be identified.**

Although not providing an absolute definition, these features provide a useful benchmark against which to explain networks and make judgements about the kind of collaborative relationships that can be defined as network organisations. Even with these boundaries in place, these features still encompass a wide range of network types that go beyond the scope of this study. The networks considered as part of this study were further limited in scope to:

- Inter-organisational networks: that is, networks between formal organisations, be they public, private, or civil.
- Explicit networks, specifically networks that are recognisable by certain features, such as a defined purpose or goal; recognisable membership; and with identifiable rules, norms or values.
- Networks focused on or engaging with issues related the provision of humanitarian assistance or protection, or Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR).
- Networks made up largely or exclusively of national-level actors, as opposed to international NGOs or members of the UN system.

These parameters provided an initial boundary to the types of relationships understood as humanitarian networks in this study, and were used to guide both the literature review (particularly to focus on formal inter-organisational networks) and to identify the networks considered in the case study research. Within the scope of this study we are therefore looking at national level networks comprising: A structure of ongoing, voluntary, and dynamic relationships between autonomous organisations, with a recognisable membership and explicit purpose or goal, focused on improving humanitarian performance or reducing the impact of disasters and conflict.

This limited scope excludes from consideration many networks that play an important role in the humanitarian system (as well as excluding the possibility of defining the humanitarian system itself as a network). Such structures include:

- Informal networks of individuals for the exchange of tacit and situational knowledge (ALNAP 2004).

- Professional networks between individuals, for improving skills and promoting innovation (HPCRR 2012)².
- Informal and emergent social networks using information technologies, encouraging more decentralised decision-making and shifting power from agencies to affected populations (OCHA 2013).
- Formal humanitarian coordination mechanisms operated under the auspices of the UN system alongside government response structures³.

² At the international level this would include important practice focused network such as the Humanitarian Policy Network (HPN), and thematic networks such as the discussion groups maintained by the Cash Learning Partnership.

³ The primary reason for excluding humanitarian coordination structures is they to date have largely focused coordinating international actors. Despite the fact that when functioning they display the features which can usefully be describe using a networks lens, it could also be argued that they do not constitute networks given that they are only partially voluntary for many actors, and perform a structured role

It is not the argument of this research that such networks are not real or important, as they are doubtless shifting the way assistance is delivered and changing the relationship between agencies and those affected by crisis (and the relationship between national networks and coordination mechanisms is discussed more below). Instead, it is important to understand that these relationships represent a different kind of structure, and should be understood and analysed as such. By limiting the scope of the research as outlined above, this research hopes to illuminate a particular kind of networked collaboration taking place at the national level, and to better understand the implications of these networks and the factors contributing to their successes.

Networks and Innovation

An important factor driving the growth of inter-organisational networks in the private sector has been their role in driving innovation. A growing body of empirical evidence suggests that they can facilitate both the development and spread of innovations in a range of industries. The basic premise for the value of networks for innovation is that the process of creativity is dependent on making new associations, which is encouraged by the meeting of different perspectives that takes place in networked environments.

Much of the thinking related to the relationship between networks and innovations stems from the growth of new models of 'open innovation', which stress the importance of organisations engaging with others and sharing ideas, in order to innovate and bring new goods and services to market, often sharing risk and reward with others (Chesbrough 2003). Innovation management researchers Joe Tidd & John Bessant (2011) have highlighted four major arguments for pursuing innovation through networks:

- Collective efficiency, and the ability to share the costs of investing in the development of new products and services.
- Collective learning, and the potential to facilitate shared learning processes in which partners exchange experiences, challenge existing models and develop new insights and ideas.
- Collective risk taking – sharing the inevitable risks associated with innovation and allowing participants to absorb higher levels of risk than they would be able to independently.
- The intersection of knowledge sets, and the sharing of knowledge across frontiers.

2. Networks in the humanitarian system

At the global level, there are a number of networks in the humanitarian system, which – notwithstanding their international nature – are analogous to the inter-organisational national networks that are the focus of this study.

Describing relationships in the humanitarian system using the vocabulary of networks is not new (Kent 1987). To describe the collective system as a network exceeds the definition of a network in this study. Nonetheless, it is useful to understand the a system as consisting of ‘multiple interacting layers’ rather than a hierarchy ‘reaching from global headquarters down to “the field”’ (Currion 2012). Recent research by ALNAP has highlighted that humanitarian actors comprise a system (rather than a network) ‘by virtue of their shared broad goals and underlying values, and their interdependence in field operations’ (Harvey et al., 2010), while for others humanitarian actors are characterised ‘as much by similarities and shared values as by differences and competition (Labbé 2012). These traits immediately speak to the relevance of networks as a tool for understanding a system characterised by a huge range of collaborative relationships and structures. There are now ‘a plethora of network structures and platforms supporting and shaping humanitarian agencies’ efforts to coordinate and collaborate’ (Ramalingam et al., 2008). Whether described as partnerships, consortia, collaborations, platforms or, indeed, networks, these structures engage almost all actors involved in the humanitarian endeavour, cutting across states, international organisations, NGOs, the private sector and beyond. In the humanitarian system there are a number of high-level networks seeking to contribute to the governance of the system, and well as networks focused on particular issues or themes. Examples of such networks include:

- The Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR), representing nine humanitarian confederations and agencies, particularly mediating their input into the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.
- The International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), which brings together national and international humanitarian NGOs to marshal coordinated action at the policy level
- ALNAP itself, which convenes a broad range of humanitarian agencies around issues of performance and accountability.
- Communication with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC), which looks to develop research and policy around how agencies communicate with the communities they seek to assist.
- Networks between Church, Islamic or other religious groups, and the network made up of members of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

These are joined by regional structures such as ADRRN, which seeks to promote coordination and collaboration among NGOs and other stakeholders, for effective and efficient disaster reduction and response in the Asia-Pacific region. In Africa, the emerging African NGO Network brings together civil society actors working on refugees and displacement. States affected by disasters and crises have also developed collaborative structures: the South Asian Disaster Knowledge Network (SADKN), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Humanitarian Assistance Centre, and the Centro de Coordinación para la Prevención de los Desastres Naturales en América Central (CEPREDENAC), are all examples of this, seeking both to improve the overall quality of collaboration, and develop policy and practice.

Of most relevance to this study are networks and collaborations between humanitarian actors operating at the national level, either as national manifestations of international structures, or emerging out of a particular context. These are enormously diverse, some falling within the scope of networks as defined in this study, others beyond it. They range from having a focus on improving immediate humanitarian response, to being centred on efforts to improve the response environment more generally, focusing for instance on thematic issues or policy change.

A striking number of the networks and collaborations described in the literature (and identified in the case study research below) are concerned with efforts to coordinate the activities of humanitarian agencies and other actors. Defined broadly as the organisation of the different elements of a complex body so as to enable them to work together effectively (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d), from this perspective, coordination can be seen as an overarching supra-function performed by networks. Within the humanitarian system, coordination has been more tightly identified as the 'systematic utilization of policy instruments to deliver humanitarian assistance in a cohesive and effective manner' (Sommers 2000), and involves sharing information about operations and making decisions to prevent duplication and fill gaps in response (Stephenson 2004; Adinolfi et al. 2005). The most prominent humanitarian coordination structures found at the national level are those convened by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), supporting a Humanitarian Coordinator and Humanitarian Country Team, and, at the sectoral level, providing support through the cluster approach. These structures have developed rapidly since the Humanitarian Response Review (Adinolfi et al., 2005) and the resulting humanitarian reform process. Given their largely international nature, and the marginal participation of national and local agencies (Steets et al. 2010), these structures fall outside the scope of networks as defined in this study. They nonetheless play an increasingly important role in agreeing common priorities and strategies, mobilising funding and other resources, as well as data and information management. Efforts to gauge their acceptance by the system show them to be, on balance, an improvement,

although significant concerns remain – not least that they exclude national actors (GHP, 2010; Harvey et al., 2010; Taylor et al., 2012); making their interface with national networks an increasingly relevant issue.

Notwithstanding the perceived successes of formal humanitarian architecture, most international NGOs now see coordination as the responsibility of all actors, with a range of other structures now recognisable (Currion & Hedlund 2011). These structures have emerged where there has been a perceived failure of UN coordination structures, such as the NGO Joint Initiative in Zimbabwe (Buchanan Smith & Scriven 2011), or where there is a need to bring together a large group of NGOs operating in a chronic emergency, such as the South Sudan NGO Forum. In addition to engaging in efforts to improve the day-to-day coordination of response activities, many of these structures also work to promote quality and accountability standards and initiatives at the national level, and to create links between global consortia and platforms, and national level action (Bellardo 2011). These NGO coordination mechanisms are identifiable as the type of network structures that are the focus of this study. It is important, however, to note that a distinction can be made between facilitating members to coordinate their own activities, and being formally invested with responsibility for coordinating common action; the latter being a more challenging prospect for non-hierarchical networks of autonomous actors.

Strikingly (but perhaps unsurprisingly), the examples of national networks found in the literature are dominated by international actors operating at the national level: in addition to the examples from Zimbabwe and South Sudan cited above, they include the Somalia NGO Consortium, the Pakistan NGO Forum, and the Comité de Coopération des ONGs in Chad (Bruell 2012). Discussions by international NGOs have noted the challenges in engaging national and international actors in the same coordination structures, not least resource constraints and divergent priorities – with national NGOs seeking capacity-building support, while international NGOs are motivated more by a desire for collective engagement with inter-agency coordination and other actors. There is, however, an appreciation of the benefits of national NGO membership in international NGO coordination structures, including their close proximity to the community, their role in grounding the work in the national context, and their scope to improve wider partnerships between national and international NGOs (Bellardo 2011; Bruell 2012).

With the structures above governing relationships between actors at the heart of the humanitarian system, the literature review also identified structures aimed at improving relationships with actors at the edge of or outside the system, for example private sector or military actors. Recent research conducted for the Humanitarian Futures Programme (HFP) identified fifteen 'platforms' in the form of intermediary organisations, networks, alliances, and temporary coalitions,

facilitating private sector engagement in humanitarian action (Oglesby & Burke 2012). More controversially, increased military involvement in humanitarian action has left many actors struggling to find mechanisms for coordination between military and humanitarian actors, particular given their divergent cultures, operating structures and basic goals (Metcalf et al., 2012).

This range of examples supports the proposition that collaborative relationships play an important role in the humanitarian system. At a macro level, the need for structures to mediate relationships appears to be a direct consequence of the independent yet interdependent nature of actors in the humanitarian system, which can be most clearly seen in the cascading of international coordination structures from the global to national level. Looking at those examples that more closely resemble the networks that are the focus of this study, they appear to be driven by what Suzanne Taschereau & Joe Bolger (2006) have described as ‘a belief that the capacity of networks is somehow greater than the sum of its parts’. Humanitarian actors – in particular NGOs – appear motivated to form networks to improve the effectiveness of their action, increase the exchange of information to improve the coherence of response, and boost their collective ability to influence external actors and policy discussions – for example, relating to maintaining space for principled humanitarian action. More generally, this section has underlined the need to be specific about the types of structure that constitute a network. The next section builds on this, drawing on network theory to provide tools for understanding and explaining networks and the functions they perform.

Understanding networks

So far, we have traced the increasing importance of networks as an organisational form, and described the particular kind of inter-organisational networks that are the focus of this study. This section explores the different forms that such inter-organisational networks can take, and the particular functions that they can be seen as performing. There is a rich and varied literature exploring networks from various perspectives and using a range of theoretical and analytical approaches, and useful efforts have already been made to apply elements of the networks literature to the humanitarian system (Ramalingam et al. 2008). This section does not provide a comprehensive overview of the networks literature; rather it presents particular theoretical and analytical approaches for describing and understanding networks and what they do. It is hoped that these will be of use when analysing the networks in the case studies, and collaborative structures in the humanitarian system more generally.

Network forms

While all networks seek to govern collaborative relationships between members, the form a network takes relates to its specific structures and processes. These include the composition of its membership, the way decisions are made, how the network is administered, and the way resources are raised and used. These

structural attributes, whether consciously developed or a consequence of organic change over time, dictate how a network fulfils its functions.

Looking at how networks use evidence to influence policy processes, Enrique Mendizabal (2006) has noted the link between the form of a network and the functions it performs, the latter a result of a combination of explicit motives and goals, and the implicit effects of its structure. Central to the form a network takes are the rules by which a network is governed and administered, which will have a fundamental influence on the nature of relationships in the network. Keith Provan & Patrick Kenis (2007) have drawn on empirical studies of inter-organisational networks to categorise the way in which networks can be administered. Their typology rests on whether the network is governed (or administered) by the membership or externally, resulting in three distinct forms⁴:

⁴ Importantly, the definition of networks under which these label have been developed is compatible with the definition used here. In particular, they have been developed in relation to 'whole networks', 'consisting of multiple organizations linked through multilateral ties... formally established and governed and goal directed rather than occurring serendipitously' (Provan et al. 2007 citing Kilduff & Tsai, 2003).

Participant-Governed Networks: described as the simplest and most common form, they are governed by members themselves, with no supporting entity. They can be formal, with regular meetings of designated representatives, or informal, through ongoing but typically uncoordinated efforts of those with a stake in network success.

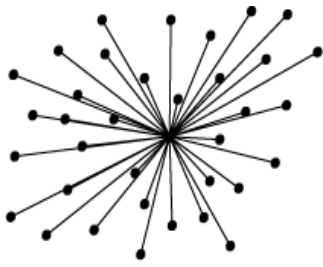
Lead Organisation–Governed Networks: in which all activities and decisions are coordinated by a single member, acting as a lead organisation. Such networks become 'highly centralised and brokered, with asymmetrical power.' The lead organisation may carry the cost of network, receive resource contributions from network members, or seek and control access to external funding.

Network Administrative Organisations (NAOs): where a separate administrative entity or secretariat run the network and its activities. Network members may interact with one another, but the central body plays a key role in coordinating and sustaining the network. An NAO may be modest in scale, consisting of only a single individual, often referred to as a facilitator or broker, or it may be a formal organisation constituting a secretariat.

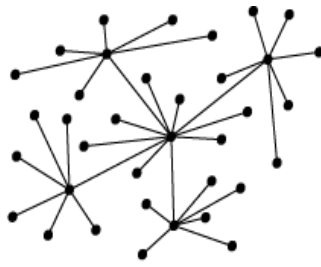
These three types provide a useful tool for categorising networks in the humanitarian system, and also help to unpack a number of other factors contributing to a network's form and the role of their organising structures. Although it is important to draw a distinction between an administering entity and the relationships that form the network itself (Hearn & Mendizabal 2011), the structure of such a body will have important implications for the nature of relationships that take place.

An important descriptive feature is the level of centralisation of exchange, and the distinction between centralised, decentralised, and distributed networks. Here, the former is represented as a 'hub and spoke' configuration with the secretariat at the centre, the latter is a coalition of actors who are all interconnected with each other (Johansson et al. 2005; Schwartz 1987).

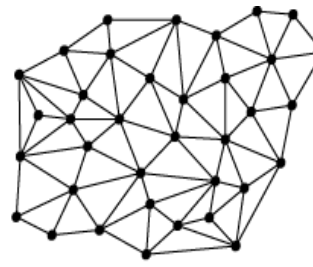
Three types of network format



Centralised



Decentralised



Distributed

Although they are idealised types, these two models nonetheless help to differentiate between networks where the important relationships are between a secretariat or Lead Agency and individual members, or more distributed models marked by relationships between members, perhaps facilitated by a supporting entity. Networks with a stronger, more empowered supporting entity may be more predisposed to a centralised network form.

Finally, returning to Mendizabal's work on research and policy networks, a distinction is drawn between 'support' and 'agency' networks. A support role suggests a structure designed for the flow of resources from a central entity outwards towards its members, while conversely an agency role might suggest structures designed to channel resources inwards towards the centre, which will use them to influence policies on behalf of the members (Mendizabal, 2006).

Network functions

Simply put, network functions are what networks do, and are found across the literature as a tool to describe the nature of the action networks undertake. Research by the ODI's Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme has identified a number of functions based on their experience working with networks, developing this over time into the Network Functions Approach (NFA). This approach was developed from an initial description of network functions by Yeo (2004), primarily being used to describe the functions of research and policy networks (Mendizabal 2006a; Mendizabal 2006b). More recently the NFA has been applied to networks in the humanitarian sector (Ramalingam et al. 2008), and refined for broader application (Hearn & Mendizabal 2011).

The research in this study draws heavily on the NFA, and uses a modified version to explore the national humanitarian networks identified in the case study research. This modified version includes an additional function (implementation), and does not draw the same explicit distinction between functions performed by the members and/or a network's coordinating entity – instead seeing an interdependent relationship between the two. The six network functions are as follows:

Community Building

Community building is about creating and sustaining relationships of trust between different actors. It is necessary in order to build the consensus and coherence in member relations, from which collective action may follow. It is perhaps the basic function that all networks must fulfil, and is about creating closer ties between similar actors, or actors with clear areas of common interest. Networks can fulfil this function by creating spaces for network members to familiarise themselves with one another, build relationships and find opportunities for collaboration. This might be in physical spaces, be they structured events or social gatherings.

Convening

The convening function relates to the role a network can play in bringing together and building social capital among diverse groups of actors, by brokering relationship and stimulating open discourse. The convening function is about creating trust and understanding between diverse groups, or groups with divergent interests and views. This may mean bringing together a diverse membership, or building links between the membership and other groups. Networks might convene actors through structured, facilitated exchanges (in person or online), working to create consensus and identify issues of common purpose. The status and reputation of the network itself is crucial in fulfilling a convening function.

Knowledge management

Knowledge management is about administering the exchange of knowledge and relevant information, and the pursuit of shared learning. Within this, a specific sub-function can usefully be identified, specifically relating to:

- Gathering, storing and sharing information of relevance to members, through activities such as the maintenance of websites and email lists.
- Identifying, capturing and sharing knowledge and experiences from within the networks for the benefit of members and external actors.
- Identifying and transferring relevant knowledge and experience from outside the network, making it accessible and relevant to members.

Many of the humanitarian networks identified in the literature and case study research highlight the role they seek to play in coordinating the activities of their members. While facilitating collective action can be seen as an implicit overarching function of all networks, a number of the specific activities that constitute humanitarian coordination – particularly around managing the exchange of information – are usefully dealt with under the rubric of knowledge management.

Amplification and Advocacy

Amplification and advocacy involves extending the reach and influence of

individual members, and engaging with others outside the network to bring about change. It also relates to the role networks can play in enhancing the legitimacy and credibility of members outside of the network. This might be achieved through public campaigning and engagement with the media, the development of policy materials, and private lobbying, conducted either by the network secretariat or by members acting under a network's umbrella.

Resource Mobilisation

The resource mobilisation function relates to the ability of a network to access and channel resources (both financial and technical), to increase the capacity and effectiveness of members, encourage the sharing and creation of knowledge, and to support programming by members. This function might mean developing training and capacity development exercises, the provision of advisory services, dispersing or brokering grants, and linking members with potential donors.

Implementation

The implementation function is an addition to the NFA made during the initial stages of the research, based on conversations with those engaged in national networks in Asia. The function relates to those instances where networks go beyond a resource mobilisation function and become involved in conducting operations, coordinating the delivery of relief services, and directly implementing humanitarian programmes or projects. This implementation might be undertaken by a secretariat or other NAO, or a grouping of members acting under the umbrella of the network, and might include ad hoc response or more structured and strategically developed programme activities. Most networks will not become involved in implementation.

Applying the NFA

When thinking about the things that networks do, it is important to note that the functions outlined here are neither mutually exclusive nor organised in any hierarchy. Indeed, the opposite is true: there is likely to be considerable overlap between the functions. The relevance of a given function will stem from the aims of a given network and the context in which it operates, as well as relating to its specific network form. The following section draws on this combined thinking around network form and function to describe and explore a number of network structures identified during the case study research.

3. Humanitarian networks in the Philippines, Bangladesh and Afghanistan

A central motivation for this research was to capture the experiences of national networks themselves. This section outlines the contexts of the three case studies, and describes the aims and forms of the specific networks that were identified and included in the research.

From an early stage, the Philippines was seen as a productive starting point for the case study research, and this was joined by Bangladesh and Afghanistan, all of which received field visits over the course of 2012. In all, over 60 representatives of national networks, local and national NGOs, UN agencies and national government agencies were interviewed. In all, over 60 representatives of national networks, local and national NGOs, UN agencies and national government agencies were interviewed. Full details of the research methodology and limitations can be found in the annex.

After describing the three country contexts, and the range of relevant networks that are present in each, the NFA is used to examine the functions these networks seek to fulfil. This is followed by a more general discussion of the successes and challenges these networks have faced. The study concludes by presenting a number of success factors which seek to help those working in and supporting inter-organisational humanitarian networks at the national level.

The Philippines

As with all three countries, the Philippines is no stranger to disasters and crises, vulnerable as it is to a variety of natural hazards, in particular typhoons and earthquakes. It is also still emerging from the long-running separatist conflict on the southern island of Mindanao, with an ongoing legacy of displacement. The country has worked in recent years to develop its legislative and policy structures in relations to disaster management, notably the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010 (the DRRM Act) which codified the need for a holistic approach to reducing risks and responding during emergencies (Luna 2011), and followed concerted advocacy and campaigning work by civil society groups. The Philippines was selected as the lead case study based on initial indications that national networks played an important role in humanitarian and disaster response in the country, primarily in advocating for policy changes, but also in response activities. Networked modes of action and organisation appear to be fundamentally ingrained in modern Filipino society. When asked why networked forms of organisation had emerged within the humanitarian and disaster response

sphere, a recurrent theme in the interviews was the wider culture of networking in the country. This view was supported in the literature, which highlighted the role of collective action by civil society groups in ensuring respect for democratic principles (Serrano, 2009), and wider changes that have cemented the role of NGOs in society and created models of network governance that have 'reshaped the way power is brokered and resources are allocated to different sectors of society' (Bautista, 2005). These trends go some way to explaining the relative prominence of networked forms of action in the Philippines, and in part the emergence of networks in the humanitarian and disaster management spheres, with the research identifying a number of relevant networks:

Building Disaster Resilient Communities Learning Circle (BDRC-LC) emerged in 2008 as a network for sharing experiences and learning across the international NGO Christian Aid's national partners. It has evolved to have an increased focus on response, for instance mobilising resources across member agencies for emergency assessments. The Learning Circle has a membership of around a dozen mainly local organisations working on disaster resilience and response, but with a predominately development focus. Informally structured, BDRC-LC is participant governed, with a member providing a support function, and the ongoing relationship with Christian Aid providing the nexus for the network. The primary functions are knowledge management, and building a community among members. The network also performs an amplification and advocacy function based on the experiences of members. Latterly, the network has also performed a resource mobilisation function during emergency periods, and is exploring joint response efforts through a Rapid Response and Assessment Team.

Citizens Disaster Response Network (CDRN) was founded in 1984 in order to bring together and support community-based and citizen-led organisations working on disaster response and risk reduction⁵. It consists of 17 independent regional centres, coordinated by a central Lead Organisation based in Manila acting as the central hub of the network. The network has built a strong community among its geographically dispersed membership. It provides a knowledge management function, particularly in capturing and documenting the experiences of members – it has then worked through its coordinating hub to conduct advocacy and channel resources based on these experiences.

Corporate Network for Disaster Response (CNDR) is unique in this study, as a network for private sector actors in the Philippines to engage in disaster response. CNDR was formed in 1990 with the goal of helping to build the capacity of the business sector and communities to prepare for and respond to disasters. The network currently has around 50 members, representing a range of the some of the largest private sector organisations and foundations in the Philippines. Members make an annual contribution to support the core activities of the network, which they can supplement either with further contributions or in-

⁵ It should be noted that other private sector networks were identified in the Philippines, but it was not possible to include them in the research. Research by the Humanitarian Futures Programme (HFP) has also identified a range of private sector 'platforms', some of which operate at the national level (Oglesby & Burke 2012).

kind support. A strong secretariat administers the network and oversees the implementation of projects on behalf of the membership.

DRR Network Philippines (DRRNet Philippines) was convened in 2008, with the aim of changing the legal framework governing disaster risk management and response in the Philippines, and built on previous efforts in the 1990s and 2000s. A broad grouping of over 300 civil society groups, it is structured around a core group of co-conveners, and including other networks (such as CNDR and CDRC) and international NGOs. The network formed to fulfil a specific advocacy function. With this achieved, its functions have evolved to include resource mobilisation for the implementation of the law at the local level, as well as a nascent knowledge management function.

The Humanitarian Relief Consortium (HRC) is an Oxfam-initiated effort, seeking to collectively develop the emergency response capacity of five development-orientated NGOs working as partners to Oxfam in the Philippines. The network is participant governed by a Programme Management Committee made up of HRC members, with a coordination function provided by Oxfam, which acts as a central hub for network relations. In addition to implementation of response activities in emergencies, the network provides a resource mobilisation function (from Oxfam and others), channelling resources for response and to develop technical capacities, and some in Oxfam see it as a step towards networked modes of implementation, superseding bilateral partnership approaches.

Mindanao Emergency Response Network (MERN), originally initiated by Save the Children, aims to improve the accountability and delivery of humanitarian aid and development programs across Mindanao. Currently consisting of over 50 members, including Muslim, Christian and secular organisations, MERN's membership has been expanded during specific emergencies to improve its ability to coordinate activities (so called 'MERN Plus'). It operates as a loose decentralised network without a dedicated secretariat, and is instead participant governed. Primarily established for knowledge management, and specifically information sharing and analysis, MERN engages in a variety of activities aimed at improving the coordination of response. It has also worked to mobilise resources and to directly implement the delivery of goods and services through ad hoc member groupings, where funding is allocated to a single member, which then utilises the network's response capacities.

Bangladesh

Like the Philippines, Bangladesh experiences extreme disaster vulnerability, and in particular the recurrent impact of severe weather events. The country's densely populated low-lying coastal zone is subject to annual exposure to cyclones from the Bay of Bengal, and experiences severe flooding and water logging. Despite extreme and persistent poverty, the country has made strides in disaster

preparedness and risk reduction, the result of efforts from government, as well as national and international NGOs. The country has also seen a range of government structures developed to prepare for and respond to disasters, and a policy shift towards comprehensive disaster management principles. Although there is only a limited OCHA presence in the country, new structures have been developed to coordinate government and humanitarian actors, including the introduction of the Humanitarian Country Task Team (HCTT) and sector clusters.

Described in 1974 by Henry Kissinger as a ‘development basket case’ that would be forever dependent on overseas aid, Bangladesh is now lauded as a development success story (White 2000), with particular plaudits given for its progress in disaster preparedness. Civil society actors have played a crucial role in the country’s development, with many organisations emerging following the humanitarian crisis that accompanied the country’s independence from Pakistan in 1971 (Davies 1998). The NGOs sector today is characterised by some of the largest NGOs in the world (particularly BRAC and Grameen), working alongside international NGOs and local level, community-based organisations serving just a few thousand people. International humanitarian actors are active in the country and bilateral partnership models between international and national NGOs are prevalent, while many of the larger humanitarian NGOs are also involved in a range of consortiums and collaborative initiatives, including the Emergency Capacity Building (ECB) project and the recently formed National Alliance for Risk Reduction and Response Initiatives (NARRI) consortium, consisting of eight international NGOs working on DRR and response in Bangladesh⁶.

NGOs in the country reported facing a number of challenges, relating to the competitive and often highly politicised nature of civil society, and the inequalities that exist between organisations. There are also lingering fears about corruption and the legitimacy of some organisations. The environment for the networks explored is in many ways a microcosm of the environment for civil society in the country more generally – occupying a vital role in public life, but not immune from the institutional and governance challenges facing state and other actors. Despite the prominent role for national NGOs and civil society in Bangladesh, the country did not exhibit the same prevalence for networked forms of organisation as were found in the Philippines. National actors identified cited coordination structures (particularly the HCTT) and other examples of international collaboration as factors motivating them to explore more collaboration themselves.

There are a variety of networks, associations and other structures linking actors in Bangladesh, and although many of these fall out of the scope of this research, it is important to note the existence of such structures. Focusing on those networks with a specifically disaster response or risk reduction mandate, the following organisations are included:

⁶ Consortium members include ActionAid International, CARE International, Concern Universal, Concern Worldwide, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Oxfam GB, Plan International, and Solidarités International, with HelpAge International and Handicap International as the technical partners.

Network for Information Response and Preparedness Activities on Disaster (NIRAPAD) grew out of a CARE Bangladesh project and has been operating since 1997. It is focused on providing support to disaster risk management agencies in Bangladesh, with the aim of strengthening disaster risk management and climate change adaptation. NIRAPAD currently has 23 full members. Active engagement is seen as crucial to the relevance and sustainability of the network. NIRAPAD charges a nominal membership fee but generates the bulk of its funding through a consultancy model. The network is administered by a relatively strong secretariat, overseen by an Executive Committee consisting of eight representatives from the membership selected on a rotating basis, who guide the direction of the network. Through consultancy services, NIRAPAD subsidises its central functions, which include knowledge management, mobilising resources to develop capacity, and humanitarian advocacy.

Disaster Forum, founded in 1994, describes itself as a 'national disaster preparedness network', aiming to ensure accountability among humanitarian and development agencies and promoting the rights of vulnerable people. Disaster Forum has 70 members, including programme-focused national NGOs, government agencies, donors, researchers and academics. A fifteen-member Executive Committee is selected periodically from the membership, while the networks activities are overseen by a formal secretariat. Functions the network performs include knowledge management and information sharing, as well as advocacy.

Bangladesh Disaster Preparedness Centre (BDPC) is a leading NGO in Bangladesh, founded in 1992. It does not describe itself as a network and does not have a formal membership, but was seen by many actors in the country to perform the functions of a network. BDPC is governed by a 17-member General Committee, overseeing an Executive Committee, chaired by BDPC's Director. As the only national NGO with a seat on the HCTT, BDPC plays a formal role in national level coordination structures. It also maintains a wide range of international links, and a network of local level civil society organisations working throughout the country. BDPC also hosts the secretariat of the NGO Coordination Council for Climate Change (NC4), a relatively new network, working to provide a platform for knowledge management and advocacy around climate change issues.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan's recent history is one of conflict and occupation, and today it is almost defined by the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis that has engulfed the country since the invasion of Soviet forces in 1979, more recently intensifying again with the arrival of western forces in 2001. Beyond the pervasive impact of the conflict, the country is exposed to a number of recurrent natural hazards including drought, floods and earthquakes, which increase vulnerabilities and humanitarian needs. These hazards combine with ongoing insecurity to create complex emergency scenarios, and heighten levels of vulnerability among the

population. There are currently approximately 450,000 conflict-induced Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), many displaced since 2009, primarily from the Southern, Eastern and Western regions where conflict and insecurity has increased (UNHCR 2012).

Looking beyond the tens of thousands of international troops in the country, there are a plethora of international actors operating in Afghanistan. Although many of these have been present since the Soviet invasion of 1979, their number and presence has swelled in recent years. OCHA has been present and the cluster system has been operational in Afghanistan since 2009, re-established on the urging of international agencies keen to establish increased space between humanitarian and military agendas (Jackson & Haysom 2013). The ongoing conflict and the conflation of humanitarian, development and political agendas has, in many cases, undermined respect for humanitarian principles and decreased the operating space for international and national agencies.

At a national level, overall responsibility for disaster response, preparedness and management within Afghanistan lies with the Afghan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA), headed in the event of an emergency by the National Disaster Management Commission (NDMC). It is also ultimately responsible for disaster preparedness, prevention, mitigation, management and recovery. Although ANDMA has made efforts to strengthen legislative and organisational structures at the national level, there are still major deficiencies in capacity.

National civil society actors have a vibrant history in the country, even during some of the most difficult periods of political and social upheaval. NGOs and other civil society actors continue to play an important role in Afghan society, from the community level through to national policy-making. Recent years have seen a proliferation of actors, and estimates by PTRO suggest that more than 3,000 local organizations are engaged in various forms of development action; with 190 national NGOs registered with the Afghanistan NGO Coordinating Bureau (ANCB). Within these headline figures there is great diversity in the size and capacity of individual organisations, from large national level actors to small local organisations established since 2003 as part of the government initiated National Solidarity Programme (NSP). The relative availability of funding has led to a growth in the size and range of national actors, with many working across a number of sectors.

The networks identified are diverse, and span humanitarian response, civil society development and thematic issues, such as women's rights. Despite this diversity, and the variety of ways these networks approach achieving their aims, it is striking that there is consistent focus on the aim of improving the coordination of their member's activities and the activities of agencies in Afghanistan more generally. The most relevant networks identified as part of this research, and which are examined in more detail are:

Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR), founded in 1988 to coordinate cross-border assistance to refugees, which now seeks to facilitate the work of its 114 national and international NGO members. The network is governed by a steering committee elected from the membership, and all members must sign the network's Code of Conduct. A strong administrative organisation oversees the network, and operates as the hub for relations. Originally, ACBAR's role focused on providing a platform for representation of NGOs engaging with the UN. This focus has broadened over time to include more general support for NGOs in the country.

Southern and Western Afghanistan and Balochistan Association for Coordination (SWABAC), formed as a parallel organisation to ACBAR, seeks to improve coordination within the assistance community across southern Afghanistan, from its base in Kandahar. SWABAC has over 40 members as of 2012, with membership open to government-registered NGOs, providing they can be endorsed by five other NGOs in the network. It is governed by a steering committee comprising member organisations, and has a separate secretariat administering activities. In addition to information sharing, it engages in advocacy and capacity-building.

Afghan NGO Coordination Bureau (ANCB), founded in 1991, convenes Afghan NGOs, UN agencies, donors and international organisations, with almost 200 current members. It is headquartered in Kabul with regional sub-structures, and is governed by a board of directors, elected from and responsible to the general assembly, which meets annually. ANCB engages in information sharing, capacity-building and technical assistance to its members.

Coordination of Afghan Relief Network (CoAR) is a small and relatively young network, founded in 2008 and formalising the existing relationship between five national NGOs, it is hosted by a lead organisation of the same name, and functions with the oversight of an executive board comprising representatives from its membership. It describes its functions as avoiding duplication of member's activities, coordinating member activities and joint working, and collectively mobilising resources.

Afghan Women's Network (AWN), founded in 1995 as a coordinating group for women's organisations within Afghanistan, now comprises around 100 NGO members (as well as 5,000 individual members). The network has a formal but loose, decentralised membership, with a secretariat administering the network from Kabul, and strong regional hubs linking members at this level. It is governed by an Executive Committee elected from the membership. Although its mandate is broader than humanitarian action, it has worked with a range of international humanitarian agencies, particularly in its advocacy efforts. As well as providing a forum for networking and community building, it also mobilises resources to develop the capacity of its members on relevant issues.

Afghan Civil Society Forum (ACSFo), established in 2001 as an outcome of the Afghan Civil Society Conference in Germany with the aim of facilitating the process of civil society development and state building. It now has around 450 members of different categories, including 80 member organisations, 50 individual members and 320 informal 'partners'. The network's secretariat is overseen by a general assembly and board of directors. ACSFo aims to promote civil society action in Afghanistan, which it seeks to achieve through policy and advocacy functions and by strengthening coordination amongst civil society actors.

4. Exploring the forms and functions of national humanitarian networks

There is a high degree of overlap between humanitarian and development concerns, and this is reflected in the programming concerns of national actors, with many focusing on risk reduction as part of their social development work, switching to a response modality during periods of crisis or acute need.

These initial descriptions uncover great diversity, with a wide variety of goals being pursued through networks taking different forms and pursuing an assortment of functions and activities. Looking at the overall focus of these networks, it is notable that few concentrate solely on humanitarian response issues, and most encompass actors working on development and humanitarian issues. These realities inevitably feed through into networks. Some, such as AWN and ACSFo in Afghanistan, have a broad focus, which includes humanitarian issues. Others have emerged precisely as an attempt to improve the disaster response capacities of primarily development-orientated national NGOs. This also speaks to the particular circumstances of networks and agencies working at the national level, and impacts on the forms and functions that have evolved.

National network forms

Network form relates to the structures and processes that shape the network, and the exchanges that take place within it. These stem from the particular goal or aims a network emerges to address, and the context in which this takes place. The form a network adopts in turn influences the functions it undertakes.

Looking first at membership, the networks in the study range from just five members in the case of CoAR, to hundreds in the case of others such as ACBAR, AWN, or DRRNet Philippines. This makes it challenging to draw generalisations, but also underlines the fact that membership size has an inevitable influence on the nature of the exchanges that take place – with smaller networks able to sustain closer ties, and larger networks maintaining looser ties. In the case of ANCB, its large size, with over 200 members, allows it to maintain a number of regional hubs under the national network. Given the influence of membership size on network relations, it is unsurprising that rapid changes in size appear to represent a point of stress for many networks, particularly in sustaining periods of rapid growth.

Turning to membership composition, it is striking that so few networks are solely comprised of and supported by national NGOs. The research uncovered a range of relationships, which seek to use network structures to improve response capacities, but, in almost all cases, international actors have some presence, either as members, donors, or convenors. For many national organisations this creates a relationship with international agencies described as ‘both a blessing and a curse’ – providing vital financial and technical support, but also undermining their independence and national character. One innovative model that has been pursued by NIRAPAD (which itself grew out of a CARE Bangladesh project) is to provide consultancy services to international agencies, which it then uses as funding to subsidise its network functions.

Those networks with both international and national members point to the potential power-inequalities present in national networks, although these disparities can also be seen in networks that convene members of different sizes, or across a range of types of agencies (rather than just NGOs). Given these inequalities, it is perhaps surprising that so few of the networks have formal structures to either acknowledge or address such imbalances, instead pursuing nominal equality over formal hierarchies. The exception to this is in the small number of networks formed around an international agency (in the case of the BDRC-LC and the HRC), or in the case of CDRN, using a Lead-Organisation governance model, with the administrative body taking an explicit lead.

Lead-Organisation governed structures were, however, the minority, with most networks identified as having some form of secretariat function, often as a separate organisation. In many cases, these structures had considerable agency to act on behalf of members, and demonstrated a high degree of centrality, with the strongest links in the network appearing to be between the secretariat and individual members, rather than distributed ties between members. This was particularly the case in Afghanistan and Bangladesh, where network secretariats were in many cases legally registered as NGOs. Conversely, in the Philippines a high proportion of networks were Participant- or Lead-Agency Governed, and focused more on supporting the actions of members to operate as networks, and facilitating more decentralised exchange between members, perhaps reflecting the higher levels of trust existing between actors in the country.

National network functions

Moving beyond the size, shape and nature of the relationships in the networks, this section looks in turn at the different functions performed by networks in Afghanistan, Philippines and Bangladesh. This is followed by reflections on how networks can create inter-network links. Conclusions are then drawn around the challenges and opportunities facing national humanitarian networks.

Community Building

Community building is about creating and sustaining relationships of trust between different actors. To some extent, all the networks captured in the research sought to build stronger links between their members, with creating trust and openness crucial to success in other functions.

This function cut across networks of differing size and focus. One approach can be seen in networks that have sought to build close ties between relatively small groups of actors. In Bangladesh, NIRAPAD has worked hard to build trust, and it has sought to develop governance and membership structures that support this, and remain open in its exchanges and decision-making. In the Philippines, CDRN has built a community among similar (but geographically isolated) local organisations, creating opportunities for interaction and exchange. In some instances, the desire to build a strong sense of community has been pursued by limiting the size of the network: this is perhaps most striking in the case of the CoAR network in Afghanistan, which has intentionally limited its membership to just five organisations, with new potential members having to clearly demonstrate how they would add value to the network.

A different form of community can be seen in those networks that seek to bring together a large number of actors around a particular issue. This might be broad (in the case of the AWN or ACSfo in Afghanistan), or extremely specific, such as DRRNet Philippines. Despite these differences, there did appear to be a shared recognition that regular opportunities for exchange – particularly through face-to-face meetings between members – were important in building trust, openness and a sense of community.

It is notable that in both Afghanistan and Bangladesh, where the NGO sector is characterised by a diverse range of often competing organisations, networks appear to have found it more difficult to build trust among their members. This has, in some cases, challenged member engagement and sustainability, and, in others, led to more explicit efforts to build trust and openness, for example, through the development of an NGO Code of Conduct for members of ACBAR in Afghanistan.

Convening

The convening function relates to the role a network can play in bringing together and building social capital among diverse groups of actors, by brokering relationship and stimulating open discourse. The challenges of this function are underlined by the mixed successes of those seeking to convene a diverse formal membership, such as Disaster Forum in Bangladesh, with respondents reporting a lack of vibrancy in network ties. More success appears to have been achieved where networks have created links to facilitate dialogue with other structures and actors, rather than bringing them into the network

In Afghanistan, ACBAR has a formal role alongside OCHA within the AHF, and is seen as playing a vital role in convening NGO, UN and government actors. ACBAR's success here appears to lie in its reputation. Membership of ACBAR is seen as important to national and international organisations to ensure visibility and access to information. This and examples from elsewhere (including BDPC's role on the HCTT in Bangladesh and OCHA's interest in engaging NGO networks in the Philippines), suggests that there is a potential role for national networks in collaborating with other structures to convene around issues of shared concern. Whether a network can be considered to be conducting convening functions rests on judgements about the extent to which actors involved in a network can be considered different or similar. In the Philippines, MERN convenes actors with similar humanitarian and peace-building goals, but draws them from across the political and religious spectrum. Stressing their common interests and shared humanitarian principles appears to be important in minimising differences. This can also be seen manifested in the work of DRRNet Philippines, which, after building a community of members has engaged a much wider group of stakeholders, stressing their shared interest in strengthening disaster legislation in the country.

Knowledge management

The range of activities collected under the rubric of knowledge management was among the most frequently cited function that networks were seen as fulfilling. A number of networks were explicitly formed with the intention of knowledge management and shared learning. This included BDRC-LC, the HRC, CDRN, and CNDR in the Philippines; NIRAPAD and Disaster Forum in Bangladesh; as well as ANCB, CoAR and AWN in Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan, many activities described under the rubric of 'coordination' involve collecting, filtering, storing and sharing information, and can be seen as part of knowledge management function. This takes place primarily through the networks' websites, newsletters and other publications. ACBAR makes extensive use of its web space to advertise jobs (a commercial service) and publishes a range of guides to the NGO sector and various policy issues in Afghanistan. ACSFo publishes *Jamea-e-Madani* (civil society magazine) on a monthly basis to reflect the views, analyses and various dimensions of civil society. The magazine is distributed throughout the country, reaching an estimated two million people, and also supports the network's advocacy function.

Learning and knowledge management are central to the aims of CDRN, as is the belief that vulnerable communities should be the central actors in disaster response. This has provided the network with a defined focus, and CDRN has fulfilled a range of functions in order to refine, develop and promote the concept, with learning the persistent theme. Members have been encouraged to capture

and document examples of practice, and CDRN also captures experiences and case studies from individual members, which are then shared within the network and beyond. A particular feature of CDRN is its relatively formal, centralised structure, and the bounded and close-knit members. The network's coordinating and secretarial functions are fulfilled by Citizens Disaster Response Centre (CDRC), based in Manila, which also forms the face of the network nationally and internationally. The network is conscious of using its relatively small size to maintain an open, honest and informal dialogue for both explicit and tacit knowledge exchange, resulting in what one respondent referred to as combination of 'information and inspiration.'

A much newer network, BDRC-LC also has a small, close-knit membership and a high-level of focus. BDRC-LC provides a platform for learning and peer support amongst Christian Aid partners, in order to be able to draw on a wide range of experiences of response and risk reduction. Christian Aid's evaluation noted the perceived success in enabling learning from network members who participated in initial training, and bringing together otherwise diffuse organisations has continued to be a key strategy (Neame et al., 2009). Other initiatives have included the collecting and publication of good practice, and giving local partners an opportunity to share experiences. This multi-faceted process – mobilising resources to bring in outside knowledge while recognising the value in members' own experience – was held to be particularly valuable.

In comparing the knowledge management activities in Afghanistan and the Philippines, a link can be seen between form and function. In Afghanistan, where the secretariats of ACBAR, ACSFo, and others have a high degree of agency, they are valued for their role in collecting, filtering and disseminating information. Conversely, examples from the Philippines demonstrate networks supporting the exchange of knowledge and learning between members, entailing a different set of activities.

A final point is the importance of informal and tacit knowledge exchange. These unstructured exchanges clearly do not respect the boundaries and divisions between formal, named networks, and instead take place in the wider context of networking. Nonetheless, they were highlighted as important by respondents, and should be seen as forming an ongoing backdrop to the more formalised activities undertaken by specific networks.

Amplification and advocacy

Amplification and advocacy involves extending the reach and influence of individual members, and engaging with others outside the network to bring about change. Along with the knowledge management function, it was one of the areas where networks operating at the national level were perceived to have had greatest success.

The most obvious examples of advocating for policy change at the national level can be found in the large advocacy coalitions, such as DRRNet Philippines, AWN and ACSFo, but also include networks such as Disaster Forum, and ACBAR. DRRNet Philippines is a conglomeration of over 300 NGOs, CSOs, and people's organisations, formed with the goal of pushing for a new legal framework for disaster management and risk reduction. Using familiar advocacy tools such as policy, public development, campaigning and private lobbying, it leveraged its networked structure linking community level perspectives with national policy debates, and presented itself as a collective, common voice.

The relationships within the network were repeatedly cited as important in allowing it to stay relatively informal and flexible, and operate on a low resource base. High levels of mutual trust between 'co-convenors' also allowed for representations to be made on behalf of the network. Much of this trust was a product of existing relationships between individuals, but also stems from consensus-based decision-making and the equality of members within the network, despite different resource inputs. Undoubtedly a national level network, DRRNet Philippines is equally the product of a symbiotic relationship with international NGOs, who played a crucial role in establishing and sustaining the network, while at the same time remaining at a distance from its everyday governance and activities.

The aim of achieving a new law for DRRM in the Philippines provided an extremely well-defined target to focus activities. In the wake of the passing of a new legal framework the network has entered a period of transition, as it seeks to ensure the implementation of the law, particularly at a local level. Disaster Forum in Bangladesh was likewise seen as playing an important role in advocating for changes in national level policy. However, a perceived loss of relevance in recent years may be a result of its failure to evolve its focus as the external context changed.

Resource mobilisation

The resource mobilisation function relates to the ability of a network to channel resources (both financial and technical), to increase the capacity and effectiveness of members, or to support response activities. This function appears to be an important motivating factor for many national organisations to form or engage with networks. Given the general funding environment for national actors this is unsurprising, but also presents a challenge for networks, as funding remains a major factor inhibiting their own growth and sustainability.

Resource mobilisation is a broader function than the channelling of funding, but this was primarily how it was perceived, particularly by network members. Specific examples such as sharing of Requests for Proposals were seen as an important

service: others spoke more generally of the role that established networks could play in linking members with donors, and particularly the benefits in terms of legitimacy and credibility that membership may bring.

The channelling of resources through networks was also seen as an area of potential tension, with networks becoming the setting for resource competition, undermining trust and openness. This appears to be particularly the case in networks aiming to support links between their members, perhaps as there is a greater risk of capture and instrumentalisation by members than in a network with a secretariat with more agency and independence. This concern was particularly expressed in Bangladesh, where some described intentionally not initiating a network on humanitarian accountability issues for fear of creating greater competition. This risk of co-optation was also described by the secretariat and executive committee of NIRAPAD as being an important concern for them when developing structures and rules for the network.

A number of networks have had success in mobilising resources to develop member capacities. Perhaps the best example of this relates to the provision of training resources and workshops, undertaken by a large number of networks. Workshops were seen by members as an opportunity both to access formal knowledge and training, and to engage with other network members. Such trainings also provide an opportunity to build national actors' knowledge of international standards and codes, with examples of trainings being conducted on the Sphere Standards, humanitarian accountability, and international humanitarian architecture.

A small number of networks appear to be combining financial and technical resource mobilisation. The BDRC-LC, for example, was born out of existing partnership arrangements between Christian Aid and a range of national and local NGOs. These relationships have been transferred into network settings, and additional resources provided. This model benefits from the relationships and exchange between members, and Christian Aid is able to support the same agencies during periods of emergency. Looking broadly their work in the Philippines, Christian Aid has highlighted 'the importance of moving beyond bilateral partnerships to consider the 'ecosystem' of actors in a given context, and to consider how international agencies can support and strengthen networks between diverse actors' (Nightingale 2012).

Implementation

The implementation function relates to those instances where humanitarian networks go beyond resource mobilisation and become involved in operational programming. Only a minority of the networks identified were involved with or interested in fulfilling a service delivery role, and others saw it as risking their status as networks. Those that had demonstrated success in the area

were all based in the Philippines. CNDR, which brings together companies and foundations, has delivered both response and DRR projects managed from within its secretariat on behalf of its members. These projects have utilised funding from its membership as well as donors such as ECHO, and been delivered in partnership with NGOs.

MERN has successfully brought together different members to develop proposals for emergency response activities in Mindanao. The network does not have a legal personality, and donor relationships have been conducted under a lead agency, which then distributes funds to other parts of the network. Also in the Philippines, the HRC formed specifically with the intention of using networks between organisations to increase response capacities and effectiveness, and jointly responds during periods of disaster. The HRC grew out of a group of Oxfam partners, and the organisation continues to sustain the emerging network. Although it provides the consortium (and its members) with critical funding, Oxfam describes the HRC as a 'humanitarian broker.' National NGOs obtain funding to grow over time, while the network (and its international partners) retain the capacity to surge and respond to disasters beyond the capacity of local actors (Cairns, 2012). From this perspective, the HRC is an example of an international NGO promoting collaborative relationships between national organisations as a route to increasing their sustainability.

Although these collaborations in the Philippines might show the promise of a new networked response model, the views of those interviewed in Bangladesh and Afghanistan sound a note of caution. In Bangladesh, in particular, a range of respondents spoke in general terms of the risk of networks encroaching into their members' areas of work, damaging the relationships in the network. NIRAPAD in particular argued that clarity of roles and responsibilities was important in avoiding 'mission creep' by the network, bringing it into completion with the work of members, and cited other examples of networks in which they saw this has happening. The iterative approach of CoAR in Afghanistan, and their work to avoid functional duplication between members might also be seen as a result of the risk of competition leading to a breakdown in network ties, particularly as the secretariat is closely linked to a lead agency.

Analysing successes and constraints

This study started by highlighted the challenges around the role of national and local actors in humanitarian response, and has tracked the rise of networks in the system and elsewhere. It is clear that actors in the humanitarian system see value in networks and other forms of collaboration as a way to coordinate response and enhance capacities. Given the non-hierarchical, interdependent nature of the humanitarian system, networks offer the possibility to build trust between independent actors, effectively govern relations, and take collective action. An increasing number of international NGOs are also looking at networks as a

potential structure around which to build new response modalities, based on diffused capacities as well as the dynamic exchange of knowledge and resources. For national actors themselves, engaging and building networks is seen as important for accessing and sharing knowledge, and increasing their profile, credibility and influence. For many, they also offer the potential of increased access to resources.

Existing approaches to understanding networks have been adapted and applied to relevant humanitarian and DRR networks in the Philippines, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, capturing the form and function of over a dozen national level networks. Some have formed around specific thematic or policy issues, others to support actors based on their profile or location. These networks also take a number of different forms – from large distributed networks with weak ties between members to smaller groupings with stronger ties. Turning to the functions that these networks perform, examples have been identified across all six of the categories used to describe what networks do. The research did not attempt an independent assessment of these networks, exploring instead their successes as perceived by those working with and within them. Important areas where networks are seen to be adding value include:

- *Strengthening the sense of community among actors at the national level.* This appears to have been most successful at building trust and strong inter-organisation links when carried out within small, close-knit networks (whether centrally administered or not), but has also included large coalitions around specific issues, and, in some limited instances, networks convening across different types of actor.
- *Creating systems and spaces for the capture and exchange of knowledge.* A range of activities were described under the moniker of knowledge management. Successes have included the collection and management of information by network coordinating bodies or secretariats, sharing this with members in order to improve response. Other networks have sought to facilitate the capture and exchange of knowledge within the membership, documenting good practices and creating forums for the exchange of learning and experiences. This has been particularly successful where it has brought in new knowledge, while recognising the value of members' own experiences.
- *Advocating for national level policy change.* Among the most visible successes of national networks has been in bringing together national and local actors to engage with government and humanitarian actors to advocate for policy change at the national level. This has been most successful when it has stressed the localised, consensus-based nature of advocacy networks. Beyond the work of large advocacy networks, many stressed the credibility and access that network membership brought, and the opportunities this presented to

advocate on particular issues.

- *Channelling resources to national NGOs.* An area where there was much interest in capturing and sharing successes related to the role they could play in mobilising resources to support national and local NGOs. Many networks were engaged in activities to share information on funding, and connect members with potential donors, in some cases, using network membership as a badge of credibility. Potentially the most important examples of this function were those innovative models of collaboration between international and national NGOs. Using networks to foster links between agencies, these networks are seeking to improve response by creating high-quality, adaptive response capacities across agencies, underpinned by the facility to mobilise resources internationally when needed.

These successes go some way to explaining the enthusiasm and potential for networks as a form of organisation. But they should not be seen as a panacea for the challenges facing national and local actors, who face a number of barriers to their success, growth and sustainability.

Although there are many instances of networks operating as a forum to foster a sense of trust, community and mutual accountability, examples were also found where relationships had broken down, and networks had become the setting for competition between members. In a small number of cases, there were fears that the network organising entity was itself coming into competition with the membership.

Although there are successes in networks mobilising resources (and, in limited cases, acting to directly implement response activities), access to financial and technical resources remains an inhibiting factor for many networks – as it continues to be for many national organisations themselves. Although many members expressed a belief that the transaction costs associated with network membership are commensurate with the benefits, it is striking how few networks are able to sustain themselves through membership fees, instead relying on support from (international) donors. A particular challenge relates to managing power inequalities between network members, often when they include both national and international agencies.

Individual networks are part of larger national systems, and must also think strategically about external ties. This means engaging with international agencies to secure resources, while protecting their independence and national character. All three case study countries had some formal international humanitarian architecture present. These structures were seen as important and beneficial by individuals across government, international, and national agencies, although they were also seen as struggling to integrate national NGOs, either to exchange

information or contribute to decision-making. This issue was also combined with a low level of awareness of the cluster system amongst those national NGOs not engaged in national policy debates.

Examples of efforts to link coordination mechanisms with national networks include: the co-chairing of the Afghan Humanitarian Forum (AHF) by ACBAR together with OCHA; efforts to include regional networks such as MERN in regional level clusters; and the inclusion of the BDPC in the HCTT in Bangladesh. Although each of these examples has its own limitations, they suggest that engaging with collaborative and network structures is seen offering a practical opportunity to more systematically engage with national actors. National networks (and particularly those consisting of national NGOs), must find ways to create formal ties to improve access to international coordination mechanisms, rather than creating isolated parallel structures.

In addition to linking national organisations, many representatives saw value in building strong international links with international platforms and networks (including ADRRN). Climate change networks and those focused on DRR were seen as examples of where this had led to increased access to knowledge and credibility at the national level. A number of humanitarian networks also engaged with international platforms, including ICVA. In Bangladesh, BDPC in particular was highlighted for the way it had successfully built international links, as was DRRNet in the Philippines. Ultimately, national networks are a product of the unique settings in which they develop, and will be required to evolve to reflect the concerns of their members' and the environment for humanitarian action more generally. Thinking about networks in relation to their form and function provides a useful descriptive tool, and should prove beneficial in planning strategic development and change. Other tools such as Social Network Analysis may prove useful in exploring the nature of links that already exist. These tools will inevitably struggle to capture the nature of relationships and collaboration in a given context. When looking to support networks, the effects of local social and political cultures should not be ignored, and what works in one setting may not necessarily be replicable in another. Crucially, however, across all the case studies and more widely in Asia and beyond, humanitarian actors are pursuing networked forms of organisation in order to work collectively in the face of growing humanitarian needs.

5. Eight success factors for national humanitarian networks

An important motivation for this research was to identify where networks had been successful, and the factors contributing to this success.

There are a number of limitations that should temper efforts to make definitive statements about why networks succeed or fail. These include the scope of the research, which did not aim to evaluate the performance of individual networks; the limited monitoring and evaluation undertaken by the networks themselves; and broader challenges of attributing any given change to a single actor or network. Nonetheless, it is still possible to identify a number of features present to varying degrees in those networks perceived to be successfully performing specific functions.

1. **Successful networks demonstrate clear aims and goals, creating cohesion and mobilising action among network members.**

Across the range of networks explored, the clarity of a network's focus (whether on a specific goal or thematic area) appears a significant factor for success, particularly in ensuring enduring engagement from members, and transforming shared values into action. This appears to hold true across a wide range of networks, from smaller structures focused on knowledge sharing and learning, to large advocacy coalitions with specific policy goals, and a tighter focus is seemingly more important in larger networks where ties between members are comparatively weak. Although a network's goal should be agreed and clear, the rationale and motivation for individual organisations to pursue these aims through the network may vary, with the clarity of the overall goal helping to mitigate conflict and encourage the development of consensus.

Finally, although a clear network focus is important, networks must also recognise that they need to be dynamic and adapt to change. This includes developing incrementally over time as they build trust within the network, and social capital and credibility externally, as part of mutually reinforcing 'virtuous circles' underpinned by strong member engagement.

2. **A network's membership should be of a size and composition that creates cohesion and supports its functions.**

The networks included in the study range from just five members to many hundreds, and there is no optimal network size. What appears to be important from the case studies is that a network's size and membership profile are commensurate with the functions it seeks to perform.

Where networks have sought to convene a range of actors and perform an advocacy function, they have successfully formed large coalitions of diverse actors around issues of common concern. Conversely, networks focused on learning and knowledge sharing appear to have been successful when they have remained relatively small. Crucially, size affects the degree of participation by each member, the nature of discussions, and the degree of openness in exchanges. Networks appear to find convening members across a range of organisational types more challenging than with relatively homogenous groups, and period of growth in membership may pose a particular challenge to network cohesion.

3. Organisational forms and structures should enable a network to perform its given functions.

The findings from the research support the proposition that for a network to successfully perform a desired function, it must develop and sustain the appropriate structures to support this (Mendizabal 2006b; Hearn & Mendizabal 2011). Support-based networks, with a relatively informal structure and secretariat function, appear suited to capturing and sharing knowledge between members: larger, looser networks are more suited to external advocacy function, in some cases where the secretariat has considerable agency. A number of the networks operating in Afghanistan meet this latter description.

The success of CDRN in supporting its dispersed membership through its hub and spokes structure is a clear example of a network form making a positive contribution to the fulfilment of its functions, in this case focused primarily on knowledge management and resource mobilisation. National networks appear to find it more challenging to maintain distributed networks, with secretariat bodies tending to demonstrate considerable agency. This situation also poses risks, with the potential for a secretariat coming into direct competition with its members and threatening the cohesion of the network.

4. To succeed, national humanitarian networks and their supporters must identify sustainable funding models that protect network independence.

Any network must raise resources commensurate with its role and functions, if it is to maintain member engagement, avoid freeloading, and protect its independence. This poses a particular challenge for national networks, given the cyclical nature of much humanitarian funding, and the challenges facing national organisations in accessing institutional funds. None of the national network included in the research were fully funded through membership fees, and for those that do charge a membership fee, this was seen as a useful tool for securing engagement from members, rather than a viable funding source.

International agencies, and in particular NGOs, had some relationship with all of the national level networks in this study, and their importance will likely continue. Beyond familiar concerns about the dominance of international actors, the role they play in supporting national networks was broadly seen as positive. Within the case studies, a number of successful examples of international engagement may provide models and lessons for use in other contexts:

- In the Philippines, the Christian Aid convened BDRC-LC, and the more recent Oxfam-initiated HRC, demonstrate how international NGOs can harness networks to develop capacity and channel response funds, in models that evolve beyond traditional bilateral partnerships.
- In Bangladesh, NIRAPAD has been developing an innovative network structure that allows it to access funding and resources through the provision of consultancy services to international actors, then using these resources to support national members.
- The perception of DRRNet Philippines as a national initiative was important to its success in advocating for change. Support provided by international agencies (in the form of advocacy advice and financial resources) was seen as important, yet remained at arms length, with the secretariat function hosted in a national NGO.

All of these examples feature a limited number of international actors providing sustained support over time, in some cases formalised in network structure. In all these examples, the international actors recognise the need to maintain national ownership, and have balanced their input accordingly. Finally, these relationships appeared to be more successful when the power and resource inequalities between national and international actors were recognised, rather than when they were nominally equal network members.

5. For networks to function sustainably, they must develop and maintain clear, transparent governance structures, avoiding competition and duplication.

All networks need rules to govern the exchanges that take place within them, and these will differ from those governing other forms of organisation. Unsurprisingly, these structures and rules work best when they are clear, transparent and understood by the membership. It also appears that governance structures work best when recognising the dynamism of networks, for example by ensuring that there is rotation of office holders, and norms can also develop over time, so that structures remain relevant and fit for purpose. Balancing formal and informal rules appears to be an important part of achieving this.

Networks are seen by many national NGOs as an important channel for them to access funding and other resources, despite the transaction costs associated with network membership and the challenges networks face in accessing resources. Success factors here include the formal role played by networks in brokering these relationships, but also the more tacit role they have played in increasing the mutual accountability of their members, and their credibility to external actors (who can struggle to judge the capacities of national organisations, particularly during response).

Successful resource mobilisation appears to be underpinned by strong and transparent governance structures, overseeing exchanges and increasing the credibility of the network. Where this appears to have been most successful, it is based on a clear delineation between the functions and activities of the network and those of the membership, thus minimising competition between members and any secretariat (whether independent or hosted by a member).

6. National humanitarian networks can benefit from fostering external links, both nationally and internationally.

Many of the successes that national networks have achieved relate to their ability to gather and share knowledge and advocate for changes in national level policy around disaster response and reduction. Both those working in networks and their members felt that creating external links between individual networks, at the national level and internationally, had important benefits for individual networks. These benefits were defined as improving access to information on development in policy and practice, and providing an opportunity to share learning with organisations in other settings. Others stressed the value of their own knowledge and experience, which they felt deserved to be recognised and shared outside of its original setting.

A particularly important relationship for many national humanitarian networks will be with formal humanitarian architecture, in particular the HCT, clusters or similar structures. Given the formal role of these humanitarian coordination structures and the stated aim of many networks to facilitate coordinated action among their members, there is obvious scope for collaboration. There is, however, a danger of creating parallel structures, and links should be built on the basis of an understanding of these structures' relative merits, with awareness raising and information sharing an important first step. The role of gatekeepers may play an important role here, as they leverage existing links and relationships for the benefit of the network.

Some also described the importance of building international links in boosting the credibility of their efforts nationally. Given the inevitable transactions cost and barriers to greater international engagement, resource constraints may place

limits on the extent of international engagement. Again, gatekeepers appear to be important here, playing a role in representing the network in international forums.

7. Networks need strong leadership to succeed, but this must be based on consensus and humility.

Like any organisational structure, good leadership is an important factor in the success of a network, and can play a crucial role in ensuring cohesion within the network and ensuring maximum external reach and influence. This view was supported across the case studies, with leadership consistently cited as an important factor influencing the success of specific networks in achieving their goals.

Examples of effective leadership cited in the research took a number of forms, including strong individual leadership within a secretariat, and from individuals in member organisations. Although in less specific terms, participants in the research also stated the negative influence that strong individual leadership can have within a network, leading to the dominance of one organisation or set of issues, or leading to stagnation and a lack of dynamism. Effective leadership also took the form of collective action by the network (members and secretariat).

These examples speak to the nature of leadership in network environments, where the non-hierarchical structure of relationships means that traditional models of leadership may act to weaken network ties if they are perceived to undermine the equity of network member relations. Although traditional models of humanitarian leadership favour strong individual characteristics, it may be the case that distributed leadership models provide a viable and effective model for leadership in network settings.

8. National humanitarian networks can benefit from adhering to and promoting humanitarian principles and standards.

A final feature of successful national humanitarian networks relates to their potential role in upholding and promoting respect for humanitarian principles, among their members and the wider humanitarian community. On one level, this appears to contradict wider trends identified among the agencies participating in national level networks, particularly the extremely blurred distinction between humanitarian and development agendas, with many primarily development-focused national agencies active in response and DRR. Despite this, networks can be seen playing an important role in diffusion and in promoting core humanitarian standards and codes, for instance providing documentation and training around the Sphere Standards, and encouraging transparency and accountability.

In addition to this information-sharing role, the trust and social capital that can be created in successful networks can play an important role in helping national actors to maintain their independence and neutrality, where otherwise they might be subsumed into larger political agendas and be unable to promote an impartial response. This motivation appears to have been present when forming a number of networks, notably those networks working in areas affected by conflict.

Evaluating networks

Despite the rising prominence of inter-organisation networks, this excitement has not been matched by efforts to systematically evaluate their performance and effectiveness, and the theory and practice of network evaluation are both in their infancy (Keystone Accountability, 2010). Even where networks are seen to be successful in achieving their goals, this is often based more on the perception of stakeholders than objective evaluation. This was particularly the case for the national networks explored in this study, where little or no evidence of systematic M&E was identified, or referred to by respondents as a source of evidence of success or failure.

The arguments for evaluating network effectiveness are clear. To ensure the long term engagement of network members and wider supporters (including donors), any network must be able to generate evidence of the extent to which it is achieving its goals, whatever these may be. Yet as we have seen, network forms of organisation are different in a number of ways from other forms of organisation, and subsequently the ways in which their effectiveness is evaluated also differ. Evaluation in the context of networks requires an appreciation of how networks foster member engagement, how they add value for members, and how the links a network creates between members mobilise greater forces for change. This requires analysis that looks both internally at the operations of the network and externally, at the level of a network's external influences (Church et al., 2002) Keystone Accountability (2010), having collated and summarised a wide range of tools for evaluating networks, suggest using three metrics against which to categorise network effectiveness:

- Network vibrancy: tools measuring and monitoring characteristics essential to the overall health and vitality of the network. These might include trust, member engagement, sustainability, diversity etc.
- Network connectivity: tools that examine the nature of the ties, relationships and processes that promote links in a network. These might include measurement of the quality of communications, the extent of collaboration between members, the level of coordination between members.
- Network effects: tools that help to capture and evaluate network outputs and activities, and what outcomes and impacts these contribute to. These help a network to reflect, revise and refine the original network theory of change or underlying strategies.

The appropriate tools and approaches to choose when evaluating network performance and effectiveness will depend on the particular focus, form, and function of a network. Many have drawn on complexity theory and systems thinking (Keystone Accountability, 2010), and this has been particularly relevant for research and policy networks where a critical measure of change lies in the behaviour of those outside the networks (see for example (Jones, 2011). For those focused on service delivery, the importance of exploring the perspectives of different stakeholders and the relationship between them has been stressed (Provan & Milward, 2001). Tools from network theory are also increasingly influencing thinking about ways to understand networks in the humanitarian and development system (Ramalingam, 2011). Social Network Analysis (SNA) become increasingly popular, not least because it enables the visualisation of the connections and relationships within a network or system (Davies, 2008; Durland & Fredericks, 2005).

Careful consideration must be given to which tools and metrics are most relevant for a given network, but this represents only one component of a successful M&E function. In addition, broader evaluation capacities are essential, fostering a culture of reflection from those engaged in a network, whether as part of the coordinating body or the membership (for more on the importance of evaluation capacities see Hallam, 2011 and ALNAP, 2013) . For national networks with limited resources this might mean initially targeting a limited number of engaged members or a particular project, working collectively and exploring peer-evaluation, or generating evaluative data as part of evaluations of partnerships between international and national NGOs. Such steps may provide more immediate benefits than large, impact focused evaluations, taking place in isolation from an ongoing process of reflection and learning.

Acronyms

ACAPS	Assessment Capacities Project	ECB	Emergency Capacity Building	OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ACBAR	Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief	EquityBD	Equity and Justice Working Group	ODI	Overseas Development Institute
ACFS_o	Afghan Civil Society Forum	HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership	POPI	People's Oriented Program Implementation
ADRRN	Asia Disaster Reduction and Response Network	HCTT	Humanitarian Coordination Task Team	RAPID	Research and Policy in Development
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action	HPN	Humanitarian Policy Network	RRD	Relief, Recovery and Development
ANCB	Afghanistan NGO Coordinating Bureau	HRC	Humanitarian Resource Consortium	SADK	South Asian Disaster Knowledge Network
ANDMA	Afghan National Disaster Management Authority	IDP	Internally Displaced Person	SCHR	Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations	INDMCC	Inter-Ministerial Disaster Management Coordination Committee	SHOUHARDO	Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities
AWN	Afghan Women's Network	INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation	SOD	Standing Orders on Disasters
BDCP	Bangladesh Disaster Preparedness Centre	IVCA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies	SWABAC	Southern and Western Afghanistan and Balochistan Association for Coordination
BDRCLC	Building Disaster Resilient Communities Learning Circle	LCG	Local Consultative Group	UNCT	United Nations Country Team
BNNRC	Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio Communication	LLC-DER	Local Consultative Group Working Group on Disaster and Emergency Response	WHO	World Health Organization
CDAC-N	Communication with Disaster Affected Communities	M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation		
CDRN	Citizens Disaster Response Network	MDMR	Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief		
CEPREDENAC	Centro de Coordinación para la Prevención de los Desastres Naturales en América Central	MERN	Mindanao Emergency Response Network		
CNDR	Corporate Network for Disaster Response	NARRI	National Alliance for Risk Reduction and Response Initiative		
CoAR	Coordination of Afghan Relief Network	NC4	The NGO Coordination Council for Climate Change		
COAST	Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust	NDMAC	National Disaster Management Advisory Committee		
DMB	Disaster Management Bureau	NDMC	National Disaster Management Commission		
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction	NDMC	National Disaster Management Council		
		NFA	Network Functions Approach		
		NGO	Non-governmental Organisation		
		NIRAPAD	Network for Information Response and Preparedness Activities on Disaster		

Annexe: methodology

This study is the product of collaboration between ALNAP and ADRRN, two established networks in the humanitarian system. Its objective was to improve the knowledge base around networks in the humanitarian system and in particular to explore networking by national organisations working on humanitarian response and DRR in Asia.

Scoping and literature review

The scoping for this research grew out of initial conversations between ADRRN and ALNAP, followed by more structured interviews with a number of ADRRN members operating at the national level. Given the limited previous research on national humanitarian networks, a decision was taken during the design phase to develop a number of exploratory and descriptive questions, rather than test propositions from theory. The research questions identified were:

1. In what ways are organisations currently engaged in networking at a national level?
2. What form do these networks take and what functions are networks perceived as fulfilling – what functions should they be fulfilling?
3. How does the involvement of national and international organisations in national level networks and coordination mechanisms differ?
4. How do networks on disaster and crisis response relate to networks on other relevant issues, such as DRR and development agendas?
5. How are national networks linked to other networks at and regional and international level?
6. What leads to the emergence of networked forms of action?
7. What are the key challenges and opportunities for national level humanitarian networks?

From the outset an initial scoping decision was taken to limit the discussion to relatively formal, inter-organisation networks, and to exclude informal social networks. A literature review was also conducted, identifying most-cited sources, and with a view to capturing existing research covering:

- Networks and collaboration in the humanitarian system
- Research and policy networks related to international development, particularly including the use of the NFA.
- Literature exploring the use of network theory to understand real-world networks

- Networks theory literature relating to the governance role of networks and the particular role of inter-organisational networks

Consistent with the earlier scoping decision, literature primarily focused on informal (social) networks, and network theory literature relating to non-social (i.e. technological and biological networks) was excluded from the review.

A small survey was conducted of the 35 ADRRN members, to capture more information on their motivation and means of engagement with networks. A relatively poor response rate for the small sample size (<50 per cent) led to the limited use of survey data, which was then used mainly to inform case selection.

Case study methodology

A central motivation behind this research was to capture the experiences of national networks themselves. The decision to use a case study approach was based on two factors: on the one hand, gaining access to existing networks required working through the ADRRN members, and limited resources meant it was not possible to look in detail at networks across the 15 countries in which ADRRN members are based. On the other hand, case study research is preferable when asking 'how' and 'why' questions (Yin: 2004), and enables in-depth analysis of cases in their context (Yin 2004).

Case selection was based on a combination of pragmatic considerations, and a purposive desire to identify examples of currently active networks. From an early stage, the Philippines were seen as a productive starting point. Further scoping research identified a number of active networks in the country, with a relatively high level of documented working by national networks. Finally, there was interest from network members to participate and utilise the research in their own planning. These factors were distilled to ensure the subsequent selection process identified suitable cases on the basis of objective criteria:

- Evidence of existing and active national level networks
- The quality of information available on networks in a given country
- Countries with ongoing humanitarian emergency (complex emergency) and/or with consistent exposure to natural hazards (links between international humanitarian system and national response architecture also a consideration here)
- Membership of national level NGOs in ADRRN
- Access, feasibility, and national level buy-in.

Field research and data collection

For each country case study an additional review of published and grey literature was conducted. This looked at literature relating to specific networks (which in some cases was quite limited) and relating to the nature of civil society engagement and cross-organisational collaboration more generally.

The central component of the case research consisted of semi-structured interviews, using a question pro forma that was adapted through the course of the research. Country visits taking place throughout 2012, beginning with the Philippines (April 2012), followed by Bangladesh (September 2012), and Afghanistan (November 2012). In all, over 60 representatives of national networks, local and national NGOs, UN agencies and national government agencies and were interviewed.

For each of the individual networks considered, an effort was made to triangulate different perspectives, for instance including one or more representatives of the secretariat, members of governance structures, representatives of membership, and where possible donors. It is notable that in a number of cases individuals fulfilled more than one of these roles, or fulfilled a role for multiple networks (i.e. a national organisation might be on the Board of one network and a member of others, or an international NGO might provide funds to two or more networks). Furthermore, in two examples (CDRN in the Philippines and NIRAPAD in Bangladesh) the research included facilitated workshop sessions with the networks' governing bodies, including exercises exploring network functions. Attempts to limit observer bias were made by including a small number of respondents in peer-review.

Data analysis

Given the explorative nature of the research and its descriptive intent, a decision was taken to flexibly apply existing models for categorising the form and function of the networks identified. This drew on models identified in the literature, primarily the NFA and structural characterisations of inter-organisations network (also derived from empirical research).

An iterative research process was adopted, with responses mapped against existing models and revisited during the course of the research; for instance leading to the inclusion of the additional 'implementation' function. Data collected on individual networks was interpreted and mapped against the NFA and other models, based on the analysis of the triangulated responses from the various stakeholders of each network. Although this presented a challenge in relation to inconsistencies in applying taxonomic categories, this was seen as preferential to imposing a rigid framework during the interviews. As no independent assessment of the performance of the networks was made, this data was also used to generate a narrative about the perceived successes of the networks. Conclusions were drawn by identifying patterns across the networks, where features appeared in a significant number of networks, or had an important effect on network performance; and where no strong contradictory evidence emerged. The degree findings were supported by the wider literature was also considered. The findings were also internally reviewed by ADRRN and ALNAP, and the report was subject to external peer review.

Limitations

As with any research process, certain challenges and limitations were inherent in the research design and emerged through the research process. The explorative nature of this research necessarily placed constraints on the scope for making robust objective statements about the performance or effectiveness of specific networks, which in turn impacts on the robustness of statements about factors in their success.

During the research, it was in some instances not possible to speak to the desired range of actors engaged in a given network. The research also has a potential bias towards respondents with some level of engagement at the national (capital) level, although efforts were made to mitigate this, for example through Skype and telephone interviews with local actors in the Philippines, and with the addition of a Herat-based component in the Afghanistan case study. A further challenge, particularly given the referral-sampling used to identifying participants in the research, was identifying actors who chose not to engage with networks.

It is hoped findings from this research, when read in conjunction with contextual information from other settings in which networks operate, may inform those working in and with national networks. It also may provide the basis for further research into the role and impact of such structures, establishing a number of hypotheses which may be tested against the experiences of other national level networks and analogous structures.

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