



Australian Government

Asia Pacific Civil-Military Centre of Excellence



## **WORKING BETTER TOGETHER:**

AN NGO PERSPECTIVE ON IMPROVING AUSTRALIA'S  
COORDINATION IN DISASTER RESPONSE

Michele Lipner and Louis Henley  
A Joint APCMCOE and ACFID Study  
October 2010



## About the APCMCOE:

The Asia Pacific Civil-Military Centre of Excellence was established in November 2008, in recognition of the growing importance of civil-military interaction, and is evidence of Australia's commitment to sustainable peace and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific and globally.

The Centre's mission is to support the development of national civil-military capabilities to prevent, prepare for and respond more effectively to conflicts and disasters overseas. The Centre promotes best practice in civil-military-police engagement in conflict and disaster management.

At its core is a multi-agency approach, with staff from a number of Australian Government departments and agencies, the New Zealand Government and the NGO sector.

Applying this collaborative approach to working with other government agencies, the United Nations and other relevant stakeholders, the Centre seeks to improve civil-military education and training, and develop civil-military doctrine and guiding principles.

Through its research program on relevant civil-military issues, the Centre seeks to identify best practice responses to key lessons learned - important for developing doctrine and facilitating training programs - to contribute directly to the ability of the Australian Government to strengthen its civil-military effectiveness for conflict prevention and disaster management overseas.

<http://www.civmilcoe.gov.au>

## About ACFID:

The Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) is the peak council for Australian non-government organisations (NGOs) working in the field of international aid and development.

ACFID has more than 70 members operating in over 100 developing countries. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are central to ACFID's activities and goals. ACFID administers a rigorous Code of Conduct. The Code represents the active commitment of 118 overseas aid and development agencies to conduct their activities with integrity and accountability.

The aid and development sector has a combined regular supporter base of 1.7 million households, jointly donating upwards of \$800 million in 2007/08. With AusAID and other donor funding added, total expenditure by ACFID members was \$1.063 billion in 2007/08.

This report is intended to contribute to the debate about best practice in disaster management.

<http://www.acfid.asn.au>

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# Foreword

The report *Working Better Together: An NGO Perspective on Improving Australia's Coordination in Disaster Response* is a collaborative effort between the Asia Pacific Civil-Military Centre of Excellence (APCMCOE) and the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID). This collaboration reflects the strong partnership between the two organisations and our collective commitment to the promotion of best practice in disaster management.

The report offers us unique insights through the lens of the Australian NGO community into the challenges, opportunities and ways forward for multi-agency cooperation in disaster management. It reflects on what is currently perceived of as good practice and offers ways forward to enhance multi-agency cooperation in the future.

The report also serves as a timely reminder that disaster management is not only about enhancing civil-military engagement or whole-of-government engagement, but 'whole-of-community' involving governments, UN agencies, NGOs, international organisations, donors, national and international defence forces, police and communities themselves. The recommendations from the report reinforce the notion that we all have vital roles to play in disaster preparedness, planning, response and mitigation. What will drive us forward towards better practice in this regard is our commitment in principle and practice to stronger partnerships and our collective pursuit for excellence. The stakes are high, because ultimately we are talking about not only saving lives, but helping communities become more resilient to the impacts of disasters when they strike.

We commend the authors of the report for their fine work and recommend it as essential reading for anyone working in the civil-military domain.



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# ACRONYM LIST

ACC	Australian Civilian Corps
ACFID	Australian Council for International Development
ADF	Australian Defence Force
AFP	Australian Federal Police
AIFDR	Australia-Indonesia Facility for Disaster Reduction
ANGO	Australian non-government organisation
APCMCOE	Asia Pacific Civil-Military Centre of Excellence
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
DEC	Disasters Emergency Committee
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DPC	Development Practice Committee
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
ERF	Emergency Response Fund
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership
HPA	Humanitarian Partnership Agreement
HRG	Humanitarian Reference Group
IO	International organisation
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NDMO	National disaster management office
NGO	Non-government organisation
NZAID	New Zealand Agency for International Development
NZCID	New Zealand Council for International Development
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PFA	Periodic Funding Agreement
PIANGO	Pacific Island Association of Non-Governmental Organisations
RRT	Rapid Response Team
SOPAC	SPC Applied Geoscience and Technology Division
SPC	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
TOR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report, *Working Better Together*, is a joint undertaking between the Asia Pacific Civil-Military Centre of Excellence (APCMCOE) and the peak council for Australian not-for-profit aid and development organisations, the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID). Its purpose is to examine the issue of multi-agency coordination and cooperation in disaster response from an Australian non-government organisation (NGO) perspective by assessing the interactions between NGOs, as well as between NGOs and other stakeholders—such as the Australian Defence Force (ADF), AusAID, the Australian Federal Police (AFP), other whole-of-government agencies, international organisations (IOs) such as the International Red Cross Movement and UN agencies—in terms of preparedness, planning and initial deployment of personnel and resources. This issue is examined primarily in relation to the series of natural disasters that occurred in Asia and the Pacific in September and October 2009.

The report identifies areas where multi-agency cooperation worked best, where there were gaps in cooperation, and where greater linkages could be developed to support multi-agency planning and response to disasters. The report is intended to assist in the identification of best practices in multi-agency disaster preparedness, planning and response from an Australian ‘whole-of-community’ perspective and highlight areas where cooperation between key stakeholders can be enhanced in the future. In-field response to these disasters is not examined, although the findings from the analysis are intended to help inform best practice in relation to implementation.

Information for the report was obtained from a questionnaire that was administered through face-to-face interviews. Respondents for the study were drawn primarily from agencies sitting on the ACFID Humanitarian Reference Group (hereon referred to as ‘the HRG’), the major ACFID coordinating group for NGOs in international disaster response. Comments from respondents have been consolidated and recommendations for moving forward presented.

A number of key themes emerged from the interview process. First is the point that the coordination mechanisms currently in place generally work but could work better and more effectively. Respondents were in general agreement that challenges of coordination did not rest so much with relationships between the NGO community and whole-of-government stakeholders as they did within the sector itself. There was largely consensus that AusAID is an appropriate conduit for information exchange and coordination opportunities with other whole-of-government entities. The relationship between the NGOs and AusAID is largely seen as a positive one and increasingly defined as a partnership.

The second point to emerge is that while systems and processes for multi-agency interaction require strengthening and a degree of standardisation, the HRG’s comparative advantage is as a policy and advocacy body and as a driver for a proactive approach to disaster management rather than as a more reactive coordinating body for disaster response. With the growth of non-government organisation (NGO) confederations and alliances has also come a change in how NGOs respond to disasters. The whole concept of confederations has helped further professionalise the sector and rationalise the use of resources in disaster response. Encouraging more coordination in disaster response within an Australian NGO context, while important, is thus secondary in the much larger picture of international disaster management.

While coordination of an international emergency response from Australia may not be of primary importance, the third point is that planning, preparedness, vulnerability reduction and mitigation are everybody’s concern and responsibility. In this, emergency planning, preparedness, mitigation and response must be approached as a ‘whole-of-community’ undertaking. An approach where planning processes are siloed according to agency, stakeholder or constituency and brought together ‘after’ core constituency planning has been completed will have less impact than planning processes that engage as many stakeholders as possible from the outset.

In addition to issues related to coordination and the need to elevate disaster management in collective thinking, notable were the reflections respondents provided on more fundamental sectoral issues. The underlying themes were the same: who are we as a sector, what and where is our comparative advantage, what are our core strengths, how can we better capitalise on these strengths as a collective, and how do we further professionalise as a sector? In an age when competition for funding has increased significantly, as has the proliferation of NGOs, harnessing core capacities in a complementary fashion may actually be not only more cost effective, but also have greater development impact. This discussion is also opportune as it would come at a time when there is greater public investment in, and scrutiny of, NGO activities. As part of this discussion, there is the inherent tension between competition and cooperation amongst NGOs that needs to be overcome. One mechanism to encourage greater cooperation is a consortia approach to disaster response and/or joint funding. If competition for limited resources is indeed a constraint to cooperation and collaboration, this would do much to break that pattern.

The issue of professionalisation of the sector was consistently highlighted and is particularly relevant given changing trends in the constitution of the NGO sector itself. Whether in relation to emergency or development response, the sector is witnessing a proliferation of not only small NGOs entering into disaster response and other areas of aid and development, but an expansion of non-western responders as well. To support continuing growth and professionalisation of the sector, agencies have a role in thinking how to progress the sector, to ensure both a level of standardisation of response and adherence to a body (or bodies) of principles, no matter their origins.

And finally, perhaps the underlying theme of the report is the need not only for the ANGO community to reflect on best practice, but for the 'whole-of-community' to consider issues of added value in relation to disaster preparedness, planning and response. In this vein, the fundamental question for all stakeholders is the same: 'What does excellence look like and how can we achieve it?'

With these thematic issues in mind, a number of recommendations were put forth by respondents. The main recommendations of the study are:

### 1. Disaster Risk Reduction Should Come First

- Given the fragility and vulnerability of the region to sudden onset disasters, the NGO sector and the broader stakeholder community should be looking at how to better address chronic disasters through preparedness and mitigation measures rather than through persistent mobilisation of resources when disasters strike.
- NGOs and other key stakeholders need to make greater investment in strengthening regional, national and community-level systems of response, community resiliency and other preparedness and mitigation strategies and measures.
- Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) crosses a wide spectrum of activities and should be integrated within the overall framework of development effectiveness.
- Multi-agency and regional engagement and partnerships between government and non-government, civil and military actors must be developed and maintained in relation to DRR. In support of this, there needs to be greater, more consistent and formalised multi-agency engagement and partnerships with national disaster management offices (NDMOs), as well as with regional bodies and counterparts.
- Disaster response planning should be inclusive of all key stakeholders in Australia. As part of this, joint simulations and trainings in Australia and in disaster-prone regional locations, involving all key stakeholders in disaster response, should be encouraged. This also offers particular opportunity to promote best practice from a civil-military perspective.
- There should be greater efforts to integrate monitoring and evaluation into disaster preparedness and response activities in order to establish a cycle of continual learning to improve disaster management. Monitoring and evaluation through a 'whole-of-community' lens would also help provide greater clarity on the challenges of disaster management from multiple levels, including the civil-military dimension and whole-of-government.

### 2. Turn Competition into Coordination

- The HRG, and the Australian NGO sector more broadly, needs to move towards a culture defined by greater collaboration and cooperation. This should include looking at core competencies and expertise in order to identify sectoral synergies and complementarities.
- HRG members, and the Australian NGO sector more broadly, should more openly share strategic plans and proactively identify where there are opportunities for greater collaboration in response—whether in relation to DRR or broader development objectives.
- HRG members, and the Australian NGO sector more broadly, should be more innovative in how partnerships are formed in order to develop more holistic programming options.
- Greater attention should be given as a collective to advocacy, messaging and accountability in disaster and humanitarian response.
- The introduction of joint funding/consolidated funding mechanisms should be considered by the Australian NGO sector.

### 3. Putting Partnership into Practice

- Within Australia, a major challenge is creating a durable partnership between ANGOs and whole-of-government in disaster response. While there is the will, mechanisms for managing this partnership need to be strengthened and moved from the 'in principle' to the 'in practice'.
- NGOs and AusAID need to articulate mutual expectations of roles and responsibilities in relation to disaster preparedness and response.
- AusAID is requested to clarify their linkages with other whole-of-government stakeholders in disaster response.
- AusAID is asked to clarify how other AusAID desks and posts integrate into disaster response mechanisms when they come into play and to more freely share information coming out of post on emergencies.
- AusAID is urged to allow NGO representation, acting on behalf of the HRG, into the crisis room during emergency response.
- NGOs should continue policy dialogue with AusAID on preparedness, particularly in relation to whole-of-government engagement.

### 4. Getting the Right Information Flowing

- The HRG needs to improve its ability to manage information and knowledge in support of effective disaster response. There is significant scope for the HRG to become an effective communication channel for its own membership, the broader NGO community, the public and other key stakeholders.
- The HRG and ACFID more broadly, should develop a standardised reporting system, including common timelines for information sharing and production of emergency situation reports.
- Systems and structures to engage non-HRG members during times of emergency response need to be standardised.
- NGOs must take more responsibility for the dissemination of reports and information within their own organisations to maximise institutional knowledge and continuity.
- Information exchange in HRG emergency teleconferences should focus more on higher order strategic issues.
- ACFID should undertake a stakeholder analysis of its information management systems.

### 5. Leading From the Peak

- As a peak council, ACFID can build on its strengths and play a more active and proactive role in sector coordination. Peak bodies have a major role to play in mobilising their constituents and leading the search for excellence, innovation, impact, professionalism and vision.
- ACFID should play a stronger role in supporting excellence in the sector through leadership and vision as well as creating a space for NGO reflection on core identity and added value.
- ACFID has a key role in helping develop a climate of cooperation within the broader Australian sector and reshaping the culture of cooperation within ANGOs.
- ACFID should explore options for further funding and resourcing of humanitarian coordination in order to increase its capacity to lead policy discussion and development, and maintain reactive response capacity in times of emergency.

### 6. Reflect on NGO Identity and Impact

- Australian NGOs need to re-evaluate their core business, reflect on their identity and rediscover their value.
- The HRG should play a central leadership role in this process of reflecting on 'who are' Australian agencies and what their value is.
- Mechanisms to engage other ACFID-supported working groups on cross-cutting issues need to be identified.
- Mechanisms to more formally draw in non-HRG members and other stakeholders on strategic and operational discussion regarding broader issues affecting disaster and humanitarian response need to be developed.
- Relationships with more recent stakeholders in disaster/humanitarian response, such as private security companies (PSCs), managing contractors and the private sector, need to be actively pursued.

# BACKGROUND

In late September and October 2009, a series of natural disasters shook the Asia-Pacific region. The multitude of disasters, including major earthquakes (Indonesia and Samoa) and flooding from tropical storms/typhoons (e.g. Philippines, Vietnam), resulted in significant loss of life and assets as well as major humanitarian crises. The response to these disasters was multi-national, involving not only affected state governments and non-government resources, but international armed forces, aid agencies, the UN and donor agencies as well. The Australian response was also significant, with the mobilisation and deployment of significant government and non-government human and material resources.

Given these disasters, there was significant need from all sources to maximise information sharing and achieve a level of coherence and coordination in the planning and deployment of human, financial and material resources. The success of this effort has been examined from a number of perspectives, including agency/organisational self-assessments. This report moves away from a self-examination of lessons learned, to lessons learned in relation to cooperation and coordination between and amongst Australian NGOs (ANGOs) as well as between these aid agencies and Australian whole-of-government stakeholders such as the Australian Defence Force (ADF), AusAID, the Australian Federal Police (AFP), and other key stakeholders including international organisations (IOs) such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, and UN agencies.

Given these disasters, there was significant need from all sources to maximise information sharing and achieve a level of coherence and coordination in the planning and deployment of human, financial and material resources.

In Australia, non-government organisations (NGOs)<sup>1</sup> involved in international disaster response are predominantly organised around the ACFID Humanitarian Reference Group (HRG). The HRG is a committee of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and is intended to be an NGO coordinating body for operational and strategic response to humanitarian emergencies<sup>2</sup>. ACFID as the peak council for aid and development organisations in Australia plays a secretariat role to the HRG and facilitates coordination and information sharing both between its members, and between its members and the broader aid and development sector including whole-of-government.

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<sup>1</sup> Non-government organisations referred to in this document are aid and development NGOs.

<sup>2</sup> The HRG is comprised of 14 ANGOs in a voluntary association that ultimately reports to the ACFID Executive Committee. Its mandate is to strengthen the effectiveness of individual and collective humanitarian action and disaster management of ACFID members. The HRG achieves this mandate by: providing leadership in promoting international humanitarian quality and accountability standards to maximise emergency responses to disaster affected communities; developing relevant humanitarian and emergency response policies and guidelines; collectively building capacity through maintaining links with members and other stakeholders; providing up-to-date information to the ACFID Secretariat on current humanitarian and emergency responses; and providing relevant advice to ACFID's board.

# OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The report is a joint undertaking between the Asia Pacific Civil-Military Centre of Excellence (APCMCOE) and ACFID.<sup>3</sup> Its purpose is to explore the issue of Australian multi-agency coordination and cooperation in disaster response—assessing the interactions between agencies in relation to preparedness, planning and initial deployment of personnel and resources from the ANGO viewpoint. The lessons learned exercise identifies areas where multi-agency cooperation worked best, where there were gaps in cooperation and where greater linkages could be developed to support multi-agency planning and future response to disasters. The report will assist in the identification of best practices in multi-agency disaster preparedness, planning and response from an Australian ‘whole-of-community’/multi-agency perspective and highlight areas where cooperation between ANGOs, IOs, UN agencies and whole-of-government can be enhanced in the future.

In-field response to these disasters is not examined in this report, although the findings from the analysis are intended to help inform best practice in relation to implementation.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for the report was face-to-face interviews using a questionnaire developed and pre-tested before formal administration. The questionnaire included a series of questions relating to multi-agency coordination and information sharing/management. Major themes revolved around challenges, opportunities and ways forward in relation to multi-agency interaction, particularly between NGOs and other key stakeholders, including the Australian Defence Force (ADF), AusAID, the Australian Federal Police (AFP), other whole-of-government agencies, IOs and the UN. All respondents invited to participate in the study were provided with an advance copy of the questionnaire. This was followed up with face-to-face interviews held over June and July 2010 with ANGOs and the Australian Red Cross<sup>4</sup> in Canberra and Melbourne. Staff representing Sydney headquartered ANGOs were interviewed in Canberra and Melbourne. Interviews lasted from one to two hours and all interviews were recorded. Confidentiality regarding attribution on specific responses was guaranteed.

Respondents for the study were drawn primarily from agencies sitting on the ACFID-supported HRG. However, NGOs involved in disaster response who are not members of the HRG were also interviewed. In total, 15 interviews were held with 22 agency staff participating. Two ANGOs declined to participate, citing limited engagement in the disaster responses. A copy of the questionnaire and a list of individuals interviewed are appended as Appendix 1 and Appendix 2, respectively.

The analysis of the data, with key themes and recommendations in relation to strengths and weaknesses of multi-agency cooperation and coordination, challenges of cooperation and how to enhance the effectiveness of ‘whole-of-community’ or multi-agency disaster response, are presented in the following sections.

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<sup>3</sup> The APCMCOE supports the development of national civil-military capabilities to prevent, prepare for and respond more effectively to conflicts and disasters overseas through promoting best practice in civil-military-police engagement in conflict and disaster management.

<sup>4</sup> The Australian Red Cross, while an international organisation, is a consulting affiliate of ACFID and sits on the HRG as an observer.

# GENERAL FINDINGS

This section presents general findings generated from the questions posed to respondents. A number of questions have been collapsed to avoid duplication and enhance clarity. Where questions have been collapsed this is so noted. Furthermore, recommendations have been consolidated and appear at the end of the general findings section.

## *What were the disaster/emergency preparedness mechanisms in place prior to the onset of the disasters?*

A number of respondents suggested that the starting point for an informed response to this question required a shared understanding of what was meant by 'preparedness'. From an operational standpoint, this might include warehousing and logistical arrangements, pre-positioning of stock in high-risk zones for shared usage or other similar mechanisms.

However, thinking more strategically, preparedness also goes to the heart of disaster risk reduction (DRR) and disaster management and the strategies utilised to support, for example, community resiliency or government mitigation and preparedness measures.

*the starting point for an informed response to this question required a shared understanding of what was meant by 'preparedness'*

In terms of practical considerations, there was general agreement that few formalised preparedness mechanisms to improve multi-agency/inter-agency capability and capacity to respond to disasters exist. With that said, a number of mechanisms were identified and others were highlighted as holding potential to significantly improve preparedness. Highlighted were the following: the role of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the clusters<sup>5</sup> in supporting preparedness activities, particularly in the Pacific; trainings and simulations; disaster risk reduction; stakeholder relations with national disaster management offices (NDMOs), the Australian Government and the HRG.

**The Role of OCHA and the Cluster System.** There was general consensus that the fundamentals for preparedness, at least for the Pacific, are in place. While acknowledging that the cluster system is still evolving, as is the regional cluster coordination model, respondents felt that the cluster approach is a positive means of linking UN agencies, international organisations such as the Red Cross, and NGOs, not only in disaster response, but in relation to disaster preparedness, developing understanding of key thematic issues in the region and raising stakeholder awareness of regional resources and capacities for disaster response. Contingency planning and training that has been undertaken via the clusters was also highlighted. Overall, respondents felt that OCHA in the Pacific is becoming a catalysing force in relation to disaster preparedness and strategic planning for disaster response.

**Training and Simulations.** Many respondents highlighted training and simulations in disaster preparedness that have been undertaken in the past, including those internal to organisations and/or confederation partners, RedR trainings, in-country trainings with partner agencies or sporadic inter-agency training programs and trainings with NDMOs. Some noted the importance of global networks in relation to pre-disaster coordination, such as the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network<sup>6</sup>. However, notable as well were the comments that even with these activities, trainings and simulations were in large part not streamlined or consistent. Instead, opportunities to engage in training and simulations were largely ad hoc (e.g. training opportunities/simulations with NGOs and ADF; NGOs and whole-of-government), informal or reactive. Some suggested

<sup>5</sup> The cluster approach is a component of the humanitarian reform process launched by the international humanitarian community in 2005. The reform process seeks to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian response through ensuring greater predictability, accountability and partnership. The cluster approach aims to strengthen overall response capacity as well as the effectiveness of the response in five key ways: (1) Sufficient capacity maintained in the main sectors of response, ensuring timely and effective responses in new crises; (2) Predictable leadership in the main sectors of response. Cluster leads ensure response capacity is in place and that assessment, planning and response activities are conducted in collaboration with partners, in accordance with standards; (3) Partnerships between UN agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, international organisations and non-government organisations (NGOs), all working together towards common humanitarian objectives through the clusters; (4) Strengthened accountability with clear roles and responsibilities; (5) Improved strategic field-level coordination and prioritisation in specific sectors of response by placing responsibility for leadership and coordination of these issues with the competent operational agency. See, for example [www.humanitarianreform.org/](http://www.humanitarianreform.org/)

<sup>6</sup> 'The Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) is a technical collaboration of existing institutions and networks who pool human and technical resources for the rapid identification, confirmation and response to outbreaks of international importance. The Network provides an operational framework to link this expertise and skill to keep the international community constantly alert to the threat of outbreaks and ready to respond.' See: <http://www.who.int/csr/outbreaknetwork/en/>

that while robust preparedness plans and activities existed as part of their agency relationship to an alliance or confederation, the challenge became how to capitalise on these trainings and mechanisms more broadly and transfer best practices learned through these in-house activities to the larger external stakeholder base within Australia.

**Disaster Risk Reduction.** A number of respondents noted that disaster risk reduction is a relatively new area for engagement and is still evolving as an area of focus. Others noted DRR activities that are nominally integrated into their AusAID-funded programs through the Periodic Funding Agreement<sup>7</sup> (PFA) process. However, agencies added that while AusAID has a DRR policy, this policy is not yet fully integrated into its funding agreements and policies, and nor were agencies aware of any funding earmarked for DRR. At the same time, several respondents expressed optimism that the new Humanitarian Partnership Agreement (HPA) would address these issues.

Additionally, agencies highlighted their DRR programs currently in place that are closely partnered with NDMOs to not only build national capacity but to improve collective capacity for disaster mitigation, planning and response. In general, this area was consistently viewed as one of critical importance in relation to individual agency portfolios—particularly in higher risk areas—as well as in relation to inter-agency and multi-agency coordination and cooperation.

**National Disaster Management Offices.** Respondents noted the increasingly important role of NDMOs in disaster preparedness and response. For some NGOs, in-country offices are part of the national disaster management infrastructure where the agencies have statutory roles to play in the event of a disaster or in relation to preparedness. Respondents highlighted that disaster risk reduction activities, including those relating to planning and preparedness, cannot be done in isolation from NDMOs, where they exist.

**Australian Government.** Agency comments in relation to existing preparedness mechanisms also focused on logistics, highlighting the AusAID funded Brisbane warehouse with emergency resources available for use by a number of ANGOs (Oxfam, World Vision) and the Australian Red Cross. The 2007 study commissioned by ACFID and AusAID to look at the issue of supply chain management<sup>8</sup> had recommended the need for pre-positioning of relief items further down the supply chain and closer to areas of demand. While some agencies had placed emergency stocks in countries considered high risk, a number of respondents noted that there had been limited uptake on the general findings of the report, besides the establishment of the Brisbane warehouse.

**The Humanitarian Reference Group.** Also raised was the point that the HRG is in part a preparedness mechanism in that it forges relationships amongst the ANGOs and encourages cross-fertilisation of ideas. Further, it holds potential to transform these associational relationships into active and operational partnerships.

### *At the onset of disaster, what planning and coordination mechanisms existed?<sup>9</sup>*

All respondents made mention of the ACFID HRG teleconferences as a primary NGO coordination mechanism in Australia. At the request of any HRG member, a teleconference can be convened in response to an emergency. Teleconferences are open to HRG and non-HRG agencies that are responding and are also attended by AusAID, as well as by regional counterparts such as NZCID<sup>10</sup> upon request and need. In principle, the teleconferences are a mechanism to facilitate a coordinated emergency response. In practice, the intent of these teleconferences was identified as ranging from information sharing on agency capacities, on-the-ground needs and supply side management to discussion of funding issues and opportunities for joint messaging. Respondents also noted that the teleconferences provide the main conduit for contact with AusAID and through AusAID to the whole-of-government response.

The HRG capacity matrix was another coordination mechanism identified. The capacity matrix was developed during the response to the disasters in September and October 2009 as a means to share information about agency resources in the field without overwhelming agency staff with information. The matrix captured the geographic and sectoral focus of agency efforts as well as a brief outline of their staffing and resources deployments. However, many respondents felt the matrix was too labour intensive to maintain and update,

7 The Periodic Funding Agreement (PFA) is an emergency funding agreement between AusAID and five Australian NGOs and the Australian Red Cross that allows them to access fast-track funding in the event of an emergency.

8 ACFID and AusAID. August 2007. Emergency Response Supply Chain Assessment.

9 Questions 2, 3 and 4 merged.

10 The New Zealand Council for International Development (NZCID) is the peak body for international aid and development organisations based in New Zealand, See: <http://www.cid.org.nz/about-cid/index.html>

and that further work was needed to ensure only relevant information was included. During the response to the Haiti earthquake in 2010, the capacity matrix was redesigned to form part of consolidated situation reports produced by ACFID using input from the HRG. These consolidated situation reports were then distributed to the agencies and AusAID. Respondents noted that the consolidated situation reports were a positive initiative, allowing agencies to share information about issues such as security, logistics and advocacy.

Respondents also noted that they participate in a number of important coordination fora outside of Australia, including the Pacific Humanitarian Forum, UN OCHA and the cluster system, in-country NDMO coordination meetings, as well as their individual international confederation and alliance coordination mechanisms. Depending on the affected country or region, agencies may also coordinate with certain groups rather than others because of their longstanding presence and prior relationships with agencies in a country. There are also pre-existing arrangements with confederated partners for joint response or complementarity of response in the event of a disaster. Because of these multiple NGO coordination mechanisms, Australia-based coordination mechanisms often become of secondary importance.

Coordination mechanisms around funding were also identified. Agencies highlighted the PFA and its successor, the still draft HPA, as mechanisms that in principle help coordinate funding in an emergency response. However, these statements were qualified by noting that issues around timelines for release of funds, the identification of non-PFA partners for inclusion in funding streams for emergency response and the competitive tender design, and therefore internal competitiveness amongst NGOs, made the mechanism less than efficient as a coordination tool.

Outside the AusAID funding process, the HRG emergency teleconferences were highlighted as a forum to discuss funding issues in relation to individual agency appeals, confederated appeals, UN appeals and Australian Government pledges/commitments. Outside of the teleconferences, the appeals generated by the UN, individual agencies or confederations at the onset of emergencies (or, with some organisations, a pre-appeal process that allows for a rapid response fund) were also highlighted.

### ***What were the multi-agency coordination challenges?***

As one respondent noted, “Challenges really depend on the requirements of the response which in part depends on the scale of the disaster and the degree to which Australia is a/the major responder”. The challenges identified ranged from the impact of funding on inter-agency (NGO) cooperation to the NGO—whole-of-government relationship, the increasingly important role of confederations over individual or collective ANGO response, finding the balance between response and preparedness, secondment of staff to other agencies, and issues surrounding ANGO sectoral identity.

### **NGO-to-NGO Relations**

Respondents were in general agreement that competition for funding for emergency response had a direct negative impact on NGO-to-NGO relations. With competitive grant processes, the imperative to coordinate and/or to share information can become severely tested. As one respondent noted, “Coordination is often minimised amongst NGOs because we are competing for the same pool of funds (AusAID)”. Picking up on this theme, another respondent asked the question, “We are all seeking money from AusAID. The question becomes, how do we maintain transparency with one another?”

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transparency with one another?”**

Essentially, the issue for ANGOs becomes one of sharing information to support a more robust collaborative response versus withholding certain information in order to maintain a competitive advantage in funding proposals.

Challenges of the NGO environment also focused on a series of questions:

- With the elevation in importance of confederations and alliances in disaster response comes the question of how do ANGOs assume significant added value within their own international networks? Furthermore, how do ANGOs find added value in coordinating amongst themselves in Australia in disaster preparedness and response? As some agencies noted, although ANGOs may have similarities, they may also have different funding mechanisms and structures which will place limits on their interactions with one another. The challenge thus becomes how to maximise synergies, cooperation and coordination while recognising these limitations.
- ANGOs are increasingly finding themselves seconding personnel to other NGOs or UN agencies for disaster response. While this is an encouraging trend and one that recognises organisational synergies and complementarities, there is also a need to be more proactive in relation to practical issues such as mutually agreed to TORs, staff safety and security and media messaging.
- ANGOs have differing capacities—both in terms of human and financial resources—in relation to disaster response. Given this, and recognising that individual ANGOs, whether small or large, niche or more generalist, all have a role to play, the question becomes how to bring together this diverse community to identify NGO synergies that can be maximised in disaster response?
- While there may be significant interest in joint planning and identification of complementarities in programming that can be pursued, there is also the challenge of weighing these opportunities and interests against organisational ‘demands’ for labelling and branding. This in part goes to the issue of how the sector moves more towards a mindset of complementary action, capitalising on individual organisational strengths and core capacities. There is inherent tension between the long-term shift towards cooperative and coordinated response and the short-term needs of agencies to demonstrate their individual worth and impact to their constituencies.

## NGO-Australian Government Relationship

A number of respondents raised the question of how to maximise the NGO-Government relationship in times of emergency response. Responses in this regard focused on a number of challenges:

- *AusAID decision-making around emergency funding.* Comments centred on how priorities are determined and how decisions are made regarding allocation of funding to different recipients including multilaterals, UN agencies, IOs and NGOs. Respondents noted that while in an emergency response as much as 80 per cent of that response is physically undertaken by NGOs, in fact a majority of emergency funding is channelled primarily through multilaterals, UN agencies and IOs.
- *Relationship between AusAID desk and AusAID post.* Some respondents lacked clarity on the management streams and decision-making processes and relationships that existed between AusAID desks and posts, including over the issue of who is in charge in the event of an emergency response. NGO comments in relation to AusAID post and desk funding decisions—particularly in relation to how decisions are made and who receives funding (and on what basis)—suggest a perception problem regarding ‘how AusAID does its business’ that needs to be addressed.

- *Artificial separation of activities.* As a sector or within whole-of-government, there is the challenge of how to change mindsets around proactive planning for disaster management versus reactive response to disasters. As noted, the Asia-Pacific region is prone to natural and environmental disasters. Disasters often happen on a monthly basis yet key stakeholders are far more adept at response than preparation. The challenge that many respondents raised was how to collectively place greater emphasis on DRR rather than on response. Currently, there is no real forum to have these discussions. Further, there are no real fora to discuss effective ways of linking the spectrum of aid activities together whether DRR, emergency response, recovery or longer-term development.

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discussions. Further, there are no real fora to discuss effective ways of linking the spectrum of aid activities together whether DRR, emergency response, recovery or longer-term development.

- *Prioritisation and visibility.* Communication about disasters tends to depend on nature and scale. The more 'spectacular' the disaster, the more information is shared. This leads to the issue of prioritisation by the Australian Government/AusAID on what constitutes an emergency in the first instance. Respondents noted the challenge of what appeared to be at times 'media driven' emergencies that took precedence over chronic/protracted emergencies (e.g. Niger). Protracted crises tend to receive attention only once they have moved beyond a critical threshold of human and material loss. This is a challenge not only for aid agencies in Australia, but more generally as well. Chronic and protracted crises, although taking a huge toll, do not receive the same level of visibility, prioritisation and attention as the acute disasters that are more visually engaging, more likely to find themselves in the public domain, are taken on board at the highest political levels and mobilise significant public and government resources. The challenges become two-fold, first to reassess the way in which chronic crises are prioritised and second to better integrate chronic disasters into the DRR framework.
- NGOs reflected on the lack of a civilian face to publicity and communications emanating from the Australian Government on disaster response. Notably, the civilian face of response tends to be subsumed by the Australian military face. Agencies expressed concern that this gives distorted images of the whole-of-government/'whole-of-community' response to disasters.

### *What worked well in relation to multi-agency coordination?*

Almost all respondents indicated that ACFID HRG teleconferences are primarily an information sharing mechanism, and that they can function effectively in this capacity to assist agencies triangulate information coming from in-country sources and provide information about other responding agencies. Respondents also noted the positive aspects of the HRG's flexible terms of reference which facilitate the engagement of a wide range of non-HRG agencies and relevant ACFID working groups during the emergency teleconferences. Non-HRG agencies that attended the calls were very positive about the opportunity to raise awareness about their work and establish contact with AusAID. Moreover, non-HRG agencies noted that it was a useful mechanism to learn about staff deployment from other agencies and to identify opportunities for the provision of specialist technical support.

**messaging in relation to gifts in kind, though challenging, time and labour intensive, demonstrated that collective action by the HRG was possible and laid the foundation for future such efforts.**

Most respondents indicated that the HRG capacity matrix and consolidated situation reports were designed to share important information without overburdening staff. It was felt that they did add value and were an improvement on simply sharing agency situation reports. Additionally, respondents noted

that messaging in relation to gifts in kind, though challenging, time and labour intensive, demonstrated that collective action by the HRG was possible and laid the foundation for future such efforts.

Respondents also highlighted the potential role of the HRG in establishing and strengthening inter-agency relationships to improve in-country response. For example, during the response one agency seconded a Child Protection in Emergencies Specialist to another Australian NGO in Samoa for a week, and then to UNICEF for a further period. This was seen as a very positive example of cooperation between agencies and it was based on a strong pre-existing relationship between staff from the two agencies.

A number of respondents focused not only on the positive aspects of the HRG and its coordination at times of emergencies, but also on its potential role as a coordination body for NGOs more broadly. Comments ranged from the role the HRG played in encouraging and forging relationships amongst its members, its success in rolling out initiatives impacting on the sector such as the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP)<sup>11</sup> and Sphere<sup>12</sup>, and its increasingly important role in raising higher level issues with AusAID.

<sup>11</sup> See: <http://www.hapinternational.org/>

<sup>12</sup> 'The Sphere Project is an initiative to define and uphold the standards by which the global community responds to the plight of people affected by disasters, principally through a set of guidelines that are set out in the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (commonly referred to as the Sphere Handbook).' See: <http://www.sphereproject.org/>

### *What did not work well in relation to multi-agency coordination?*

Respondents noted that almost all coordination between agencies happens in the field, and that there is less scope for on-the-ground coordination from Australia, particularly as individual agencies increasingly respond as part of an international confederation. The confederated nature of agencies means that depending on the location and nature of the event, the ANGO may be the lead agency, it may be the supporting agency or conversely it may be providing funds in support of the larger confederation's response. As such, depending on the role of agencies within their confederation's response, Australian based staff are not necessarily in a position to coordinate with other ANGOs as they are unable to make decisions on behalf of their confederation.

Several respondents noted that increasing investment in field-level coordination mechanisms done from Australia can actually be a distraction and take time away from coordination on the ground. Even when Australian agencies are leading the response on behalf of their confederation, the multiplicity of international funding sources brings increasing levels of donor demands which can further complicate coordination. For example, Australian agencies may submit complementary funding proposals to AusAID with the aim that one agency be the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) focal point. If another agency's confederation receives funding from a different donor for WASH activities, then the agencies may no longer be able to ensure complementarity of their responses. However, as some agencies noted, if there is any exception to this it is in relation to disaster response in the Pacific where coordination may be more achievable because a number of ANGOs have a comparative advantage to be lead responders.

Some agencies highlighted that coordination within Australia may be limited when AusAID is participating because agencies still compete for the same pool of AusAID funds. While the new AusAID HPA is seen by many as a positive step towards cooperation, it still remains a competitive funding agreement. Several respondents suggested that AusAID needs to appreciate that there is an inherent contradiction between increasingly asking agencies to cooperate while at the same time maintaining a competitive funding system.

However, other agencies were more self-reflective, arguing the need for the HRG, and NGOs more broadly, to take responsibility for greater cooperation and partnership between agencies, and not to rely on AusAID or other external actors to drive coordination.

There was a strong consensus that the weakness of coordination and cooperation between agencies in terms of disaster preparedness, and more broadly DRR as well as disaster risk management (DRM), was one of the fundamental issues facing the sector. As discussed earlier, there has been some progress around shared

logistics, such as the Brisbane warehouse funded by AusAID, and while agencies do undertake joint training and simulations these are not currently done in a coordinated or systematic manner. As such, all agencies indicated that there is limited preparedness done through a multi-agency, civil-military or larger 'whole-of-community' lens and this hinders the effectiveness of multi-agency coordination in response to emergencies.

While some agencies attempted to coordinate their resources, it was ultimately impractical to organise due to time and resource pressures during the response. As mentioned earlier, two ANGOs did work out secondment arrangements but explained this was only possible due to the strong existing relationship between staff at the two agencies. Moreover, they noted that while the secondment was seen as a positive exercise there were unanticipated difficulties that arose around the seconded staff member engaging with the media, staff support and cost responsibilities. The agencies suggested that future secondments would require more formal and detailed agreements between the agencies to address issues such as these. Other responding agencies reported similar difficulties in their attempts to undertake joint responses, and noted that for such levels of cooperation to be feasible there needed to be processes and agreements in place in advance of an emergency. There was consensus that in order to develop these agreements and to understand the scope of multi-agency cooperation that is possible between ANGOs, there would need to be a significant increase in cooperative planning and preparedness efforts.

**However, other agencies were more self-reflective, arguing the need for the HRG, and NGOs more broadly, to take responsibility for greater cooperation and partnership between agencies, and not to rely on AusAID or other external actors to drive coordination.**

### ***What and who were your primary sources of information in relation to the series of disasters?***<sup>13</sup>

All respondents noted that their most valuable source of information was always their in-country partners as they provide the most up-to-date and relevant information. They also noted that in-country partners usually had relationships with NDMOs and other relevant affected government departments. Similarly, in-country partners were able to provide information from in-country coordination meetings and could channel information from these sources through to their Australian counterparts. As such, in-country partners were best placed to provide an understanding of needs and issues arising from the disaster.

Respondents also indicated that their confederation or alliance was a major source of information, bringing together regional offices and partners to share information.

Agencies indicated that the HRG coordination teleconferences were a useful information sharing mechanism, but were not a primary source of information. As discussed previously, agencies felt the HRG teleconferences were a valuable way to confirm information about the situation in-country, and to gather information about other Australian based NGOs' activities.

Similarly, agencies mentioned the HRG capacity matrix as a mechanism for sharing information about agency operations but noted the amount of work required to keep the information up to date. The capacity matrix has since been replaced by consolidated situation reports. These reports aim to relieve pressure on staff by compiling relevant information from all agencies into one concise document. Respondents were positive about the consolidated situation report, but again highlighted that it is still resource intensive to produce and needs to be further refined to capture more strategic and cross-cutting issues such as protection, security and coordination.

Other important sources of information mentioned included public websites such as ReliefWeb and AlertNet, UN OCHA and other relevant UN agencies, the cluster system, and regional coordination fora such as the Pacific Humanitarian Forum.

Most respondents also indicated that they undertake bilateral information sharing with staff at other ANGOs and with AusAID.

### ***How was information shared among stakeholders?***<sup>14</sup>

There was general consensus that during the emergency response phase, information sharing largely centred on who is doing what and where, on-the-ground organisational capacities and on-the-ground linkages with NDMOs.

In terms of 'how information was shared', the most frequently reported fora were HRG emergency teleconferences, situation reports (ACFID-generated, OCHA-generated, agency-generated), ReliefWeb, direct contact with on-the-ground partners and/or agency counterparts, email networks and confederation/agency alliance communication channels.

Key stakeholders in information sharing were identified as the ANGO community, AusAID, confederation/alliance partners, regional fora such as the Australia-New Zealand Act Alliance Forum, diasporas, NZCID and NZAID. Although AusAID was considered a key stakeholder in the information sharing process, respondents were generally of the opinion that information flow was often one way during HRG emergency teleconferences. Many noted the missed opportunity of obtaining information updates from AusAID on emerging issues, challenges, general situation on the ground, other whole-of-government department plans, and emerging donor responses.

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<sup>13</sup> Questions 1, 5 and 6 merged.

<sup>14</sup> Questions 2 and 3 combined.

### *To what extent was the sharing of information institutionalised?*

There was general consensus that information sharing through the HRG teleconferences and capacity matrix was institutionalised as a process, but that it also involved a large relational component. Some respondents felt that the good personal relationships were a particular strength of the HRG as they facilitated cooperation between the agencies on a number of fronts. Other respondents expressed concerns about the level to which the relationships between agencies are based on personal connections rather than institutional imperatives that would drive information sharing.

Agencies noted that information sharing mechanisms with AusAID and other government departments were mainly institutionalised because AusAID in principle speaks on behalf of these stakeholders when interacting with the HRG and non-HRG members in emergency response. In practice, some agencies indicated that they rely on personal relationships with staff in the ADF and other stakeholders to share information.

Respondents indicated that for other stakeholders, such as NDMOs in-country, there is a concerted effort to establish personal relationships and strengthen organisational linkages in order to maximise information sharing and facilitate a more coordinated disaster response. For example, some NGOs have co-located offices with the NDMO to achieve these ends.

### *In terms of multi-agency communication and information sharing, what worked well and why?*

There was general agreement that the HRG teleconferences were helpful, particularly in relation to obtaining an overview of what individual HRG agencies were doing. Many noted that the teleconferences also allowed for a degree of triangulation, a key need at a time when information is coming from multiple sources and the validity of that information is unclear. It was also highlighted that through these teleconferences ACFID was perceived to have improved its processes in supporting its members and facilitating member response to disasters, for example through its efforts to consolidate agency specific situation reports, draw in NZCID and reach out to diaspora groups.

Respondents were divided on the inclusion of AusAID in the teleconferences. At best, agencies felt that inclusion allowed for a single entry point, when called upon, to providing an update of whole-of-government response, including that of the ADF and other departments, as well as funding updates. At the same time, respondents felt that the quality of the NGO-AusAID relationship during emergency response was also driven by AusAID representation in coordination fora. The more engaged, forthcoming with information and consistent the AusAID representation, the better and more useful the outcomes. At the same time, respondents felt that the inclusion also had an unintended effect of raising competition levels amongst NGOs positioning for favour with AusAID.

Respondents were in general agreement that the inclusion of NZCID in the teleconferences was extremely useful in supporting a more coordinated regional response and encouraged this expanded participation for regional responses in the future.

At the same time, respondents, although supportive of the teleconferences, also felt that when OCHA was involved in a response and its information systems were up and running (i.e. situation reports), the value of the HRG teleconferences declined. Feedback suggested that HRG teleconferences were useful as interim information sharing fora but their usefulness declined as other formal coordination mechanisms (e.g. clusters) are set up and running in the affected country. With that said, respondents also balanced this comment with the suggestion that the usefulness of these teleconferences would be enhanced if the focus changed from information sharing to identification of areas where a collaborative or collective response to thematic issues, messaging or advocacy could be promoted and endorsed.

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## *In terms of multi-agency communication and information sharing, what did not work well and why?*

While respondents indicated that the HRG teleconferences function reasonably well as an information sharing mechanism there were issues as well and they are noted below:

- The degree to which HRG teleconferences are useful is in part dependent on the commitment of the members to engage. Specifically, the more focused the individual NGOs are in relation to what they 'bring to the table', and the more prepared they are to share information, the more useful the process.
- The tendency of HRG teleconferences to focus on operational issues (e.g. who is doing what, where and when) and the presentation of raw data or promotion of individual agency efforts is a missed opportunity for more strategic discussion. This is exacerbated by inconsistency in NGO representation on emergency calls. Agencies need continuity in representation and an institutionalised understanding of the HRG as this encourages a more proactive and task oriented outcome.
- Although non-HRG members are invited in on the emergency teleconferences, the structure of the teleconferences is not conducive to full participation as limited guidance is provided on intent and deliverables of the teleconferences. This represents another missed opportunity to increase the value and collective outputs of the 'coordination' mechanism.
- Information shared at HRG teleconferences may be useful in relation to what agencies are doing in Australia, but this has limited impact in relation to agency decisions in the field. Some respondents also noted that their field offices are autonomous and have primacy in partnering relationships. These field offices are well connected to existing coordination structures and not only use these systems to identify need, but to determine where and how their partners in Australia will respond.
- The ACFID consolidated situation reports are information intense and as a result time consuming to produce. Reports may take a day or two to consolidate: as an emergency response is in constant motion, a situation report is extremely time sensitive and its added value diminishes significantly if not attuned to time sensitivity issues.
- Information sharing should be reciprocal. At one level, NGOs appear reticent about being more open and transparent in what they share at teleconferences—this may be a function of competition over funding or because of other considerations. NGOs also felt that information flow from AusAID was often slow or limited. Agencies questioned the hesitancy of AusAID to share information that might be coming from AusAID posts or other donors. As a number of respondents noted, it would not appear that this information would be of a classified nature and appears to be shared with others already, such as the RRT (Rapid Response Team)<sup>15</sup>. In support of a more comprehensive and partnership-focused approach to disaster response, the more information that AusAID provides, the greater the potential for agencies to direct and/or redirect their assistance.
- Agencies reported that having AusAID serve as the contact point for all government departments reduced the demands on staff time as they did not have to navigate the contact points for multiple departments. While AusAID in principle is the conduit for whole-of-government, in practice there is only limited information shared about the activities of other government departments. Respondents specifically mentioned the Attorney General's Department (Emergency Management Australia), the Bureau of Meteorology, the Department of Health and Ageing as well as the ADF and AFP in this regard. Many noted that this represents not only a missed opportunity to create a more cohesive civil-military response, but more broadly a 'whole-of-community' response to emergencies.
- Respondents also noted that linkages with other ACFID working groups are often made only in the event of an emergency. This means that agencies are not aware of relevant initiatives and activities undertaken by working groups in non-emergency periods.
- Some respondents noted that ACFID's engagement with stakeholders outside of its membership is relatively shallow in relation to information sharing. For example, the ACFID website provides minimal information regarding a disaster and the consolidated situation reports have minimal circulation. This is also a missed opportunity for ACFID to assume a more representative role on behalf of the sector.
- Several respondents highlighted the lack of information dissemination within their own organisations. Consolidated situation reports, for example, are of limited use if not circulated within agencies as well as between agencies.

15 The Rapid Response Team is an internal Australian Government surge capacity mechanism for disaster response.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognising the limited scope for coordination, respondents were generally positive about mechanisms that currently exist between agencies and there was considerable commitment to work collaboratively to continue to improve the ‘whole-of-community’ response to emergencies. To the question ‘What recommendations would you make to improve multi-agency coordination, communication and information management?’, there were a number of key themes highlighted and they are presented below.

## ❖ Disaster Risk Reduction Should Come First

**Given the fragility and vulnerability of the Asia-Pacific region to sudden onset disasters, the sector should be looking at how to better address chronic disasters through preparedness and mitigation measures rather than through persistent mobilisation of resources when disasters strike.**

The ANGO sector and the broader stakeholder community can work to better identify patterns of disasters—specifically, where disasters are more likely to occur, for what reason (e.g. climate change), and in what frequency. Armed with this baseline information, NGOs and other key stakeholders can make greater investment in strengthening regional, national and community-level systems of response, community resiliency as well as other preparedness and mitigation strategies and measures. More practical considerations would also involve addressing supply chain issues such as warehousing and logistics, as well as training.

DRR crosses a wide spectrum of activities and should be integrated within the overall framework of development effectiveness. While disaster response will continue to be of importance, this offers the HRG opportunity to engage its own members more strategically and bring into the discussion other key ACFID working groups on this cross-cutting issue. It also allows the broader aid community to develop more comprehensive and proactive strategies for disaster management. A number of respondents noted that DRR is not only about an emergency or humanitarian response to a disaster, but covers policy development, mitigation, community resiliency and longer-term development strategies.

DRR crosses a wide spectrum of activities and should be integrated within the overall framework of development effectiveness

In support of this recommendation, ANGOs are also encouraged to strengthen individual agency and confederation/alliance capacities in relation to DRR. The recommendations made above are also relevant to all key stakeholders involved in disaster management.

Multi-agency and regional engagement and partnerships between government and non-government, civil and military actors must be developed and maintained in relation to DRR. To develop effective disaster management plans and policies there needs to be greater, more consistent and formalised multi-agency engagement and partnerships with NDMOs, regional bodies including SOPAC<sup>16</sup>, PIANGO<sup>17</sup>, ASEAN<sup>18</sup> and the Australia-Indonesia Facility for Disaster Reduction and counterpart entities such as NZCID and NZAID<sup>19</sup>. Agencies noted the strength of the HRG as a relationship building mechanism and the importance of establishing relationships in advance of emergencies. As such, agencies recommended there be a concerted and collective effort to strengthen relationships with NDMOs in Asia and the Pacific and improve ANGO understanding of national disaster management plans. Some respondents suggested that the newly created Australian Civilian Corps (ACC)<sup>20</sup> could actually serve to support NDMO capacity building through secondments to regional NDMOs.

<sup>16</sup> The purpose of the SPC Applied Geoscience and Technology Division (SOPAC) is to ensure the earth sciences are utilised fully in order to fulfil the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) mission. One element of its work is the Disaster Reduction Programme (DRP), which provides technical and policy advice and support to strengthen disaster risk management practices in Pacific Island countries and territories. See <http://www.sopac.org/index.php/sopac-overview>

<sup>17</sup> ‘The Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (PIANGO) is a regional network of NGO focal points or coordinating bodies known as National Liaison Units (NLUs) based in 21 Pacific Island countries and territories ... PIANGO’s primary role is to be a catalyst for collective action, to facilitate and support coalitions and alliances on issues of common concern, and to strengthen the influence and impact of NGO efforts in the region.’ See: <http://www.piango.org/about-piango.html>

<sup>18</sup> ASEAN is the Association of South East Asian Nations. See: <http://www.aseansec.org/>

<sup>19</sup> ‘NZAID is the agency within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade that manages New Zealand’s official development assistance (ODA) programme and provides policy advice on international development issues.’ See: <http://www.nzaid.govt.nz/about/>

<sup>20</sup> ‘The Australian Civilian Corps is a roster of trained civilian specialists who are ready to deploy to countries experiencing or emerging from natural disasters or conflict ... Specialists will be chosen for their skills in areas such as public administration and finance, law and justice, engineering, health administration and community development, as well as their ability to work in challenging overseas environments. They will be drawn from all levels of government and the private sector.’ See: <http://www.ausaid.gov.au/acc/>

Stronger relationships between NDMOs and ACFID would facilitate information sharing and give NDMOs a more forceful voice to communicate their needs, expectations and requirements, such as whether or not agency deployments to an emergency would actually be beneficial. In addition, it would recognise that agency responses should function as an auxiliary to the affected government's response. Many agencies noted that for responses in the Pacific they often work closely with their New Zealand counterparts. While links exist between individual Australian agencies and their New Zealand counterparts, what is lacking is the collective relationship between the Australian and New Zealand sectors. There was also a recommendation to reinforce and institutionalise relationships with OCHA and the cluster system in the region.

Within Australia, disaster response planning should be inclusive of all key stakeholders in Australia. As a disaster will involve government (i.e. AusAID, ADF, AFP, DFAT etc.) and non-government actors, planning should include these same actors. As part of this engagement, the roles, responsibilities and operational styles and mandates of major stakeholders should be articulated.

Joint simulations in Australia and in disaster-prone regional locations, involving all key stakeholders in disaster response should be encouraged. Whether originating from the aid community, the military, or other whole-of-government agencies, incorporating all key stakeholders (e.g. AusAID desk and posts, ADF, AFP, DFAT, NGOs, IOs, etc.) is not only good practice but would also help identify weaknesses and strengths in current response mechanisms and provide for a more realistic multi-agency response in the future. This also offers particular opportunity to promote best practice from a civil-military perspective.

There should be greater multi-agency collaboration in and attention to training programs in disaster preparedness and response. Respondents suggested this might include greater frequency in training opportunities; more inclusive training programs (e.g. open to non-confederation or alliance agencies if NGO specific); more RedR training programs and modules; rollouts of training that are focused on individual countries; and greater engagement by ANGOs in the development of ADF and AFP simulations and exercises and overall training packages.

there needs to be a greater effort to integrate monitoring and evaluation into disaster preparedness and response activities in order to establish a cycle of continual learning within the sector to improve disaster management.

Further, there needs to be a greater effort to integrate monitoring and evaluation into disaster preparedness and response activities in order to establish a cycle of continual learning within the sector to improve disaster management. In support of this, respondents highlighted the role of multi-agency lessons learned activities after a disaster response. Respondents noted the value of joint evaluation missions,

but added that they are undertaken on an ad hoc basis. Agencies indicated that these joint monitoring and evaluation missions could be standardised and undertaken after all disasters of an agreed scale. Monitoring and evaluation through a 'whole-of-community' lens was also encouraged as it would help provide greater clarity on the challenges of disaster management from multiple levels, including the civil-military dimension and whole-of-government.

Moreover, some indicated a desire for independent multi-agency evaluations to report on the effectiveness of the response after an agreed timeframe, for example six months and one year on. Through these lessons learned exercises, complementary capacities, training needs and good practices can be identified and integrated into organisational and multi-agency disaster management plans and processes.

## ❖ Turn Competition into Coordination

**The HRG, and the Australian NGO sector more broadly, needs to move towards a culture defined by greater collaboration and cooperation.**

While discussed and agreed to in principle, agencies have yet to change their organisational cultures and establish the collective momentum needed to begin to convert the promise of cooperation into practice. To change these cultures requires both a policy discussion and a conversion of agreed to policy into practical means of enhancing collaboration. These processes are not linear and they are mutually reinforcing. Changing policy as well as organisational cultures is a long-term process as many agencies noted. To start the process of having this discussion was a recommendation made in its own right. More practical recommendations were the following.

- The HRG and ANGOs more broadly need to look at core competencies and expertise and identify, through this process, sectoral synergies and complementarities. This could also include developing plans and processes for staff secondments between agencies (e.g. standard secondment agreements, specialist rosters).
- ANGOs need to more openly share strategic plans and identify proactively where there are opportunities for greater collaboration in response—whether in relation to DRR or broader development objectives.
- ANGOs need to be more innovative in forming partnerships; for example, for broadly mandated NGOs to partner with niche NGOs in order to develop more holistic programming options.
- The HRG's focus on emergency response coordination reduces its ability to engage on broader humanitarian issues and in particular its ability to deal with cross-cutting issues, protracted crises and fragile environments. As a result there was a call to focus more on these issues.
- There should be greater attention as a collective to advocacy, messaging and accountability in disaster and humanitarian response. While recognising obstacles need to be overcome in this regard (e.g. the difficulties of joint messaging when agencies have their own individual organisational mandates), there was still general 'in principle' support for collective messaging/advocacy to government and the public because it reduces the likelihood of multiple messages, unprioritised messaging, and blurred or contradictory messaging.
- The introduction of joint funding/consolidated funding mechanisms should be considered by the Australian NGO sector. Although some NGOs indicated that their participation in a confederation would likely preclude engagement in joint funding/consolidated funding mechanisms, there were many who argued that this approach would help enhance NGO credibility in the eyes of the public. It would also hold NGOs more accountable for their actions, decrease competition, and increase the potential for a more complementary response, thereby enhancing efficiencies of scale and scope.
- Agencies also noted that while the PFA/HPA process will continue to be competitive in relation to accessing funding, it would benefit the NGOs to manage the HPA process so that it becomes mutually beneficial. This includes considering how agencies can better complement one another in response by mapping out for example core institutional capacities and regional focus to maximise potential for an integrated response when disasters arise. The suggestion was also made that developing regional strategies and encouraging complementary NGO programming into these strategies is one step towards enhancing transparency and cooperation.
- While there was enthusiasm for the consortia/joint funding approach, there was also recognition by many that the sector may not be ready to embrace this new style of working. This does not, however, preclude agencies and the sector more generally from working towards this model of engagement.

## ❖ Putting Partnership into Practice

**Within Australia, a major challenge is creating a durable partnership between ANGOs and whole-of-government in disaster response. While there is the will, mechanisms for managing this partnership need to be strengthened and moved from the 'in principle' to the 'in practice'.**

Respondents were in agreement that the relationship with AusAID in emergency response is critical, particularly if and when this relationship is viewed as a strategic partnership rather than as a funding relationship. Not only is AusAID a valuable partner in its own right, but it also provides the link with other whole-of-government stakeholders in disaster response if that link is functioning well. At the same time, agencies recognised their own internal challenges of moving beyond competition to a more cooperative and coordinated relationship with one another and how this, in turn, also would help strengthen the AusAID partnership. Many respondents were optimistic that the HPA would be a valuable tool to help institutionalise a relationship based more on partnership with AusAID and encourage greater cooperation within the NGO community as well.

To further progress the NGO-AusAID relationship in disaster preparedness and response, a number of recommendations were proposed. Specifically:

- For both the NGOs and AusAID to articulate mutual expectations of roles and responsibilities in relation to disaster preparedness and response.
- For AusAID to clarify the nature of the linkages with other whole-of-government stakeholders in disaster response in each emergency. In this regard, respondents did stress that the more information AusAID shared about its activities and those of other government agencies (including ADF and AFP) in disaster response, and the more streamlined the process of information management and sharing, the more useful AusAID was as the primary linkage with whole-of-government.
- For other whole-of-government entities to share, via AusAID, their roles and responsibilities in disaster response in order to support a more integrated disaster response.
- For AusAID to clarify for each emergency how other AusAID desks and posts integrate into disaster response mechanisms when they come into play and to more freely share information coming out of post on emergencies.
- For AusAID to allow NGO representation, acting on behalf of the HRG, into the crisis room during emergency response.
- For AusAID and the HRG to work together to identify if and how synergies and relationships can be developed with the RRT.
- To continue policy dialogue with AusAID on preparedness, particularly in relation to whole-of-government engagement. Policy dialogue should also include other key stakeholders, for example, the APCMCOE, given the strong civil-military dimension of disaster preparedness, planning and response.

As discussed earlier, agencies indicated that they were generally satisfied for AusAID to remain the primary point of contact for the whole-of-government response. Some agencies indicated they would like to draw up a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between all parties in order to establish, in advance of the emergency response period, what information would be useful for AusAID and agencies to share, but also to allow AusAID to define the scope of information it is able to share. This would not only assist all stakeholders to receive the information they require, but also provide clear and transparent guidance on government policy regarding the scope of information that is shareable. This would encourage a relationship based on mutual trust needed to create a more cohesive 'whole-of-community' response to emergencies.

Moreover, while respondents understood that an MoU could not address staffing constraints within AusAID, they indicated that it could help ensure some continuity such that the quality and quantity of information shared does not fluctuate overly due to the rotation of AusAID staff who attend the HRG calls in a large-scale emergency. This continuity, also true for the NGOs, further reinforces valuable trust at an institutional level rather than simply between particular staff.

Respondents also suggested a review of the practice of deeming all contact from AusAID in-country posts as classified. Agencies felt that government policy should include flexibility for AusAID to share information from post that is not sensitive. Most felt that the current policy is overly restrictive and limits the capacity for meaningful partnership between AusAID and agencies.

## ❖ Getting the Right Information Flowing

**The HRG needs to improve its ability to manage information and knowledge in support of effective disaster response.**

While there is limited scope for Australian NGOs to coordinate an international disaster response, there is significant scope for the HRG to become an effective communication channel for its own membership, the broader NGO community, the public and other key stakeholders in Australia. In recognition of this a number of practical recommendations were put forth.

- A standardised reporting system, including common timelines for information sharing and production of emergency situation reports, needs to be developed. Follow-up situation reports should be undertaken on a periodic basis, for example one month after an emergency and three months after an emergency. A more standardised reporting system would not only improve information sharing, but also assist in strategic planning and be useful for accountability and advocacy purposes.
- Systems and structures to engage non-HRG members during times of emergency response need to be standardised. Although ACFID members can still access teleconferences if they are not members of the HRG, systems in place to guarantee access or inform constituencies that access is available appear ad hoc. Further, information reach is limited and inconsistent in its targeting.
- NGOs must take more responsibility for the dissemination of reports and information within their own organisations to help ensure intra-agency continuity, build institutional knowledge and strengthen capacity.
- Information exchange in HRG emergency teleconferences should focus more on higher order issues that contribute to shared vision, shared understanding, shared messaging and shared/complementary responses. As an example, some agencies reported confusion and competition in public messaging and highlighted that this undermines the messages of all agencies. There is the need to be more coordinated in messaging to increase their impact and reach.
- Most importantly, there is the need to identify what stakeholders want from a situation report, and more broadly determine the aim of information sharing. To this end, ACFID should undertake a stakeholder analysis looking at fundamental questions. For example, who are the key stakeholders? What do key stakeholders want in relation to information? What are the needs and expectations of stakeholders? What information adds value and what is the best way of communicating this information? Are there secondary stakeholders and, if so, what are their needs in relation to information sharing?

## ❖ Leading From the Peak

**Peak bodies have a major role to play in mobilising their constituents and leading the search for excellence, innovation, impact, professionalism and vision. As a peak council, ACFID can and should play a more active and proactive role in sector coordination.**

Respondents agreed that ACFID plays a valuable role in supporting the HRG, whether in relation to providing robust member services or facilitating coordination activities around joint advocacy, messaging and disaster response. There was also acknowledgement that if there is the intention to capitalise on ACFID as a peak body that brings together agencies on core issues affecting the sector, then more resources need to be made available to ACFID to provide this and other key services. A number of respondents suggested that ACFID needs dedicated staffing and resourcing to support emergency response given that this is a labour and time intensive activity. Better resourcing creates internal capacity to focus more on proactive policy discussion and development, while at the same time allowing for reactive response in times of emergency.

Agencies also suggested that as a peak body, ACFID could play a stronger role in supporting excellence in the sector through leadership and vision and providing space for ANGOs to reflect on core identity and added value. Further to this, it was argued that ACFID had a key role in helping develop a climate of cooperation within the broader Australian sector and reshaping the culture of cooperation within ANGOs.

ACFID could play a stronger role in supporting excellence in the sector through leadership and vision and providing space for ANGOs to reflect on core identity and added value

In support of improved information dissemination, ACFID is encouraged to review its information management systems to support a standardised approach to information sharing with ACFID members and non-members alike. ACFID should also consider how to standardise information sharing and engagement with key stakeholders, including with regional counterparts such as NZCID and other constituencies such as diaspora groups.

## ❖ Reflect on NGO Identity and Impact

**The search for greater impact begins with a search for identity and clarity of purpose. ANGOs are well positioned to promote best practice in disaster management and aid effectiveness more generally. To do so requires vision and a commitment to work together.**

While the Australian NGO sector is a small player globally, respondents highlighted that similar sized, and even smaller, countries have greater impact. Some respondents felt that the ANGO sector lacked vision and identity and it was this lack of clarity over identity that limited the sector's ability to have greater collective impact. Respondents agreed that the HRG could play a central leadership role in this process of reflecting on 'who are' Australian agencies and 'what is' their value. This would include defining common interests and the scope for cooperation and coordination.

there were strong feelings that Australian NGOs need to re-evaluate their core business, reflect on their identity and rediscover their value

There was agreement that this evaluation also needs to be mirrored at an individual NGO level. Respondents highlighted the expansion of Australian NGOs in terms of function and geographical spread, noting that many have now grown to the extent that the diverse range of activities they undertake dilutes their impact in any one area. As such, there were strong feelings that Australian NGOs need to re-evaluate their core business, reflect on their identity and rediscover their value.

At the same time, the proliferation of agencies responding to emergencies was highlighted, as was the need to ensure an effective response with this dramatic increase in numbers. In particular, agencies referred to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, where the number of agencies responding was so large as to defy coordination by any mechanism. Some suggested that this could be in part addressed by evaluating the 'value add' of NGOs in disaster response.

The lack of a clear identity also tends to obfuscate the potential role of the HRG to engage on issues pertaining to strategic direction and purpose. Respondents consistently highlighted the opportunity for the HRG to become a more proactive body as well as its potential to be a major force for further professionalising the sector and defining agendas, rather than being driven by the agendas of others. Ways forward include both strategic and practical recommendations as noted below.

- Mechanisms to engage other ACFID-supported working groups on cross-cutting issues need to be identified. Currently, the HRG tends to interact only with humanitarian counterparts. However, there are many cross-cutting issues that are relevant to other working groups (e.g. protection, human rights, disability and civil-military interaction) and there would be benefit in drawing these working groups into discussion, particularly given the competencies they would bring. The HRG also has a role to play in linking with other ACFID committees that focus on policy issues, for example the Development Practice Committee (DPC) that examines the issue of aid effectiveness.
- Further, mechanisms to more formally draw in non-HRG members and other stakeholders on strategic and operational discussion regarding broader issues affecting disaster and humanitarian response need to be developed. This might include considering how universities, diasporas, peak bodies, other NGOs engaged in disaster/humanitarian response but not part of the HRG (e.g. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Muslim Aid) can be drawn on for their expertise and experience.
- Similarly, relationships with more recent stakeholders in disaster/humanitarian response, such as private security companies (PSCs), managing contractors and the private sector, need to be actively pursued.

# DISCUSSION

The previous section summarised key findings and themes that emerged through the interview process. The recommendations that were generated are useful in that they reflect on the relationships between NGOs as much as they do on relationships between the ANGO community and other key stakeholders in disaster management.

The first recommendation highlights the need for a more comprehensive and inclusive inter-agency commitment to disaster risk reduction. The second recommendation highlights the need to fundamentally readdress the manner in which NGOs interact with one another, emphasising the importance of cooperation between agencies. This recommendation is also relevant for all key stakeholders in disaster response because it looks to creating meaningful and lasting partnerships without losing individual identities, core competencies and comparative advantage. The notion of partnership is emphasised in recommendation three, particularly in relation to AusAID, but in fact is relevant as well to other whole-of-government and non-government actors. Recommendation four recognises the value of efficient information sharing and management systems in disaster response and proposes ways of improving intra- and inter-agency processes in this regard. Recommendation five recognises the potential of ACFID, as a peak council, to help drive best practice not only with the HRG, but also more broadly. The final recommendation looks at how the HRG and the ANGO sector can enhance their competencies and contributions to the wider aid and development environment.

There are a number of points coming out of the study and the recommendations that are useful to highlight and expand upon, as they are drivers for moving forward. In the first instance, these points reflect on current 'coordination mechanisms'. In the second instance, they speak not only to the HRG but to the ANGO community as well and touch on more fundamental issues regarding identity and added value.

First is the point that the coordination mechanisms currently in place generally work but could work better and more effectively. The ANGOs interviewed for this study were in general agreement that from a multi-agency perspective, the challenges of coordination did not rest so much with relationships between the ANGO community and whole-of-government stakeholders as they did within the sector itself. There was largely consensus that AusAID was an appropriate conduit for information exchange and coordination opportunities with other whole-of-government entities, particularly the ADF. While there were suggestions for improvement—such as NGO inclusion in the AusAID crisis room during an emergency response, greater consistency in AusAID representation in HRG emergency teleconferences, and greater AusAID engagement in information sharing in relation to priorities and emerging needs—the relationship between the NGOs and AusAID was largely seen as a positive one and increasingly defined as a partnership.

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To this point, improvements are already being made in relation to coordination and partnerships are being further developed. During the interview process, a number of ANGOS reflected on the changes in coordination and information management since 2009, which were largely in response to the Haiti earthquake in early 2010. The opportunity to provide strategic input into a whole-of-government response, as was the case with the ANGO Haiti submission to the AusAID Director General in March 2010, provided the ANGO community with a sense of common purpose. It also reflected a successful effort to work together in relation to advocacy and messaging. This was further reinforced more recently with the submission of a letter to the Director General regarding the slow disbursement of the Emergency Response Fund (ERF) in Pakistan during the floods of August/September 2010. Not only did these examples serve to demonstrate that ANGOS can come together to promote, advocate and message, but that there is space to be strategic and to engage key stakeholders on strategic issues. They were also demonstrations of a true partnership relationship between the ANGOS and AusAID, and serve as a model for future interaction. Certainly, the messaging coming out of the interviews was to see these processes capitalised on in the future.

These examples also suggest that while systems and processes for multi-agency interaction require strengthening and a degree of standardisation, the HRG's comparative advantage is as a policy and advocacy body and as a driver for a proactive approach to disaster management rather than as a more reactive coordinating body for disaster response. The reality is that confederations and alliances are usually better placed to drive coordination for disaster response. With the growth of confederations and

alliances has also come a change in how NGOs respond. Individual affiliates now often play a support role versus a primary deployment role. The whole concept of confederations has helped further professionalise the sector and rationalise the use of resources in disaster response. It is no longer a matter of an agency bringing to the table individual assets and expertise, but the expertise and assets of the confederation. Encouraging more coordination in disaster response within an Australian NGO context, while important, is thus secondary in the much larger picture of international disaster management.

Planning, preparedness, vulnerability reduction and mitigation are everybody's concern and responsibility and there is certainly a role for the HRG, as well as others, in leading the discussion on the need for a greater focus on and coordinated approach to DRR, at the strategic (e.g. policy) and operational levels. Given the environmental fragility and chronic disaster risk levels of the Asia-Pacific region, there is still the tendency to focus more on response than on preparedness and enhancing community resiliency. Yet DRR, and disaster management in general, is about aid effectiveness across the spectrum from relief to sustainable development and to higher order processes such as policy development.

Given the environmental fragility and chronic disaster risk levels of the Asia-Pacific region, there is still the tendency to focus more on response than on preparedness and enhancing community resiliency.

Not only should the sector work towards gaining a common understanding of what is meant by DRR and disaster management, but there is also a need to simultaneously consider how to support a more effective multi-agency response within an Australian context that engages all key stakeholders. In this, emergency planning, preparedness, mitigation and response must be approached as a 'whole-of-community' undertaking. An approach where planning processes are siloed according to agency, stakeholder or constituency and brought together 'after' core constituency planning has been completed will have less impact than planning processes that engage as many stakeholders as possible from the outset. Whether from a policy perspective, or more operationally in relation to simulations, exercises and training, the more collaborative and inclusive the processes, the more positive the outcomes. This suggests that 'whole-of-community' will engage not only whole-of-government actors, but also non-government and other actors in conceptual and operational planning and preparedness in order to maximise a multi-agency response.

In addition to issues related to coordination and the need to elevate disaster management in collective thinking, notable were the reflections respondents provided on more fundamental sectoral issues. The underlying themes were the same: who are we as a sector, what and where is our comparative advantage, what are our core strengths, how can we better capitalise on these strengths as a collective, and how do we further professionalise as a sector?

The ANGO community is not large and as some suggested, there is a need to step back and critically look at the issue of added value as a sector and ask the question, where can we really make the most impact? But to answer this question, the issue of core sectoral identity must be addressed. The reality is that agencies may talk about these issues but the time and space to address them collectively has not been created. This discussion would focus on identifying core capacities, inter-agency synergies and complementarities and mechanisms for enhanced cooperation. In an age when competition for funding has increased significantly, as has the proliferation of NGOs, harnessing core capacities in a complementary fashion may actually be not only more cost effective, but also have greater development impact. This discussion is also opportune, as it would come at a time when there is greater public investment in, and scrutiny of, NGO activities.

As part of this discussion, there is an inherent tension between competition and cooperation amongst NGOs that needs to be recognised and efforts made to overcome this as much as is possible and reasonable.

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One mechanism to encourage greater cooperation is a consortia approach to disaster response and/or joint funding. There are benefits to single funding sources, whether along the model of the UK DEC<sup>21</sup> system, along the lines of the HPA or other single funding mechanisms.

21 The UK's Disaster Emergency Committee is an umbrella organisation for humanitarian aid agencies that acts as a single fundraising mechanism for emergency response. See: <http://www.dec.org.uk/index.html>

Single or joint funding options could serve as an incentive for collaboration in relation to response and other efforts including preparedness, research and mitigation. If competition for limited resources is indeed a constraint to cooperation and collaboration, this would do much to break that pattern. And to the argument that agencies may not participate due to their engagement in confederations, these same agencies also have signed up to similar mechanisms elsewhere, such as the DEC in the UK. This suggests that while challenges may exist, they can indeed be overcome.

The issue of professionalisation of the sector is interesting in that one of the current challenges is in relation to changing trends in the constitution of the sector itself. The sector is witnessing a proliferation of not only small NGOs entering into disaster response and other areas of aid and development, but an expansion of non-western responders as well. On the former, the rise of small NGOs may serve a useful niche but these NGOs often fall off the radar of peak bodies or other potential regulatory systems. On the latter, different standards of conduct and approach and organisational philosophies may prevail. Collectively, no Code of Conduct is universal and many have not even heard of existing codes such as the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief.

To support continuing growth and professionalisation of the sector, agencies have a role in thinking how to progress the sector, ensure a level of standardisation of response and adherence to a body (or bodies) of principles, no matter their origins

To support continuing growth and professionalisation of the sector, agencies have a role in thinking how to progress the sector, ensure both a level of standardisation of response and adherence to a body (or bodies) of principles, no matter their origins. These discussions need to be had and the ANGO community can help progress these discussions. More

specifically, the HRG can help drive this process. As part of this, there needs to be consideration of how to engage non-HRG, non-ACFID members in these discussions. By focusing only on membership, ACFID and the HRG lose an important opportunity to impact on the sector.

Finally, the public does not necessarily distinguish between NGOs. Often NGOs, UN agencies and donors are treated interchangeably. Within the NGO community this can be particularly problematic as the sheer number of NGOs makes it extremely difficult for the public to see the diversity of the sector. This creates a risk that the actions of one NGO can reflect negatively on all NGOs. Thus, the need to promote and demand best practice from new actors is essential and represents a role the ANGO community can play.

# CONCLUSION

As stakeholders are increasingly learning, and as best practice is increasingly demonstrating, disaster preparedness and response is not only about emergency and humanitarian interventions. Instead, actions taken in support of disaster risk reduction, and more broadly disaster management, are cross cutting and ultimately centre on aid effectiveness that spans a continuum of immediate life-saving intervention to longer term sustained development outcomes and effective policies.

The study has presented the argument that the HRG is well placed to help lead discussion on how the ANGO sector can work more effectively, more collaboratively, and more in partnership with one another and other key stakeholders in maximising development outcomes. Yet, the findings go beyond the HRG to reflections on the larger ANGO community—its challenges, limitations, and opportunities—as a driver for change, further professionalisation of the sector and for greater development impact. Even with the limitations

**ANGOs are also uniquely positioned to help drive best practice and aid effectiveness**

imposed by, for example, geography or status within a larger confederation and/or alliance structure, ANGOs are also uniquely positioned to help drive best practice and aid effectiveness. Although relatively small players individually in the international arena of aid and development actors, ANGOs still bring together a broad array of experiences, expertise and complementarities that can be harnessed and

made mutually reinforcing and productive. Through leadership provided by ACFID as a peak council and through committees such as the HRG, the ANGOs have, at the least, less physical constraints to coming together to identify how the sector can continue to evolve and demonstrate its relevancy and added value. At a time when so many other players are now engaged in aid and development, being self-reflective and asking fundamental questions regarding who we are as a sector, what added value we bring to the table, how we work more collaboratively as a sector, and how we work more as a ‘whole-of-community’ would seem essential.

Not only should there be reflection within the sector on core identity and added value, but this needs to extend out to all stakeholders—including whole-of-government—in Australia engaged in disaster preparedness, planning and response. We should all be asking the core question: ‘What does excellence look like and how can we achieve it?’.

# APPENDIX 1:

## Questionnaire Used For Interviews

### Coordination

1. What were the disaster/emergency preparedness mechanisms in place prior to the onset of the disasters to improve **capability** and **capacity** to respond to disasters? (For example, were there joint trainings? Shared warehousing? Shared logistics capabilities? Coordination mechanisms?) Please explain your responses:
  - a. between the NGO community;
  - b. between the NGO community and other stakeholders including ADF, AusAID, whole-of-government agencies, IOs, UN agencies.
2. At the onset of disaster, what planning and coordination mechanisms existed between Australian NGOs? As part of your answer, indicate the intent of these mechanisms and who participated in these planning and coordination mechanisms.
3. At the onset of disaster, what planning and coordination mechanisms existed between NGOs and other stakeholders, including confederated agencies, the ADF (broadly), CIMIC, JOC, AusAID, other whole-of-government agencies, IOs, the UN? As part of your response, indicate the intent of these mechanisms.
4. Were there coordination mechanisms around funding and, if so, who took part in these mechanisms, what were they intended to achieve and how did they work?
5. Overall, what were the multi-agency coordination **challenges** in terms of preparedness, planning and deployment of human and material resources?
6. **What worked well** in relation to multi-agency coordination and/or cooperation in relation to planning, deployment and preparedness? In your response, consider particularly your relation with whole-of-government agencies including but not limited to AusAID, ADF and AFP. Please provide examples in your response.
7. **What did not work well** in relation to multi-agency coordination and/or cooperation in relation to preparedness, planning and deployment of resources? Please provide examples.
8. In relation to coordination and/or cooperation, what recommendations would you make to improve multi-agency coordination/cooperation structures for preparedness, planning and deployment of human and material resources in the future?

## Information Sharing/Information Management

9. What and who were your primary sources of information in relation to the series of disasters?
10. How was information shared between Australian NGOs? What type of information was shared?
11. How was information shared between NGOs and other stakeholders? Who were these stakeholders? What type of information was shared?
12. To what extent was the sharing of information institutionalised? To what extent was it ad hoc or based on personal connections with other stakeholders?
13. Were there 'more valued' information sources?
14. Did information sharing contribute to a shared understanding of the problems/ issues/needs arising from the disasters? Please explain your response.
15. In terms of multi-agency communication and information sharing, what worked well and why?
16. In terms of multi-agency communication and information sharing, what did not work well and why?
17. What recommendations would you make to improve multi-agency information sharing and communication for the future in relation to preparedness, planning and deployment of human and material resources?

Are there other comments you would like to make that have not been covered in the questions posed?

## APPENDIX 2:

### Agencies and Staff Interviewed for Study

Organisation	Name	Title
ACFID	Fiona McAlister	Humanitarian Coordinator/Policy Advisor
ADRA	Chris Olafson	Director, Emergency Management
Act for Peace	Jenny Wells	Conflict and Disaster Program Coordinator
ActionAid	Claire Sanford	Manager, International Programs
Australian Red Cross	Carmel Flynn	International Emergencies Manager
	Supriya Metha	International Emergencies Coordinator
Burnet Institute	Chris Hagarty	Program Manager, Tibet Health and Development Advisor
CARE Australia	Sophie Davies	Coordinator Asia Team, International Programs
	Christina Munzer	Coordinator Asia/Pacific Team, International Programs
	Robert Yallop	Principle Executive, International Operations
	Alexandra Balmer	International Programs Officer
	Yvonne Marshall	Manager Human Resources
Caritas Australia	Ingvar Anda	Program Coordinator for Asia, Emergency and Humanitarian Group
Marie Stopes International	Eileen Kelly	Advocacy Advisor, Policy and Partnerships
Oxfam Australia	Jennifer Worthington	Humanitarian Program Coordinator (Pacific)
	Richard Young	Humanitarian Support Unit Manager
Plan Australia	Rohan Kent	Disaster Management Program Manager
RedR	Rhodri Wynn-Pope	Manager International Assignment Service
Save the Children Australia	Mike Penrose	Director of Emergency Programmes
World Vision Australia	Admir Bajrami	Program Officer, Humanitarian and Emergency Affairs
	Anthea Spinks	Senior Policy Advisor, Humanitarian & Emergency Affairs (HEA)
	Graham Tardif	Director of Humanitarian and Emergency Affairs

**WORKING BETTER TOGETHER**  
AN NGO PERSPECTIVE ON IMPROVING AUSTRALIA'S  
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