

NGOs and Humanitarian Reform: Mapping Study Ethiopia Report

By:

Tasneem Mowjee
Consultant, Development Initiatives, UK

Commissioned by NGOs and Humanitarian Reform project

This mapping study is one of a series of five reports commissioned by the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project. It is written by an independent consultant and does not necessarily represent the individual views of the project consortium member.

NGOs and Humanitarian Reform is a three year consortium project funded by DfID. Member agencies are ActionAid, CAFOD, CARE, International Council of Voluntary Agencies, International Rescue Committee, Oxfam and Save the Children. The consortium was formed to set up and run the project. This project was established to support the effective engagement of international, national and local humanitarian non-governmental agencies (NGOs) in reform efforts. It promotes an integrated approach across policy-relevant research and operational learning to explore what works and does not work in reform informed by the operational experience of NGOs on the ground. The project aims to strengthen the NGO voice in policy debates and field processes related humanitarian reform.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Acronyms	1
Executive Summary	2
Introduction	8
1. Context	9
2. Coordination	11
2.1 What is the cluster approach?	11
2.2 Cluster approach in Ethiopia	12
2.3 Coordination effectiveness	15
2.4 Provider of Last Resort (POLR)	16
2.5 Other coordination mechanisms	17
3. Funding	18
3.1 Humanitarian funding in Ethiopia	18
3.2 Humanitarian Response Fund (HRF) funding data and operation	19
3.3 The HRF Review Board	21
4. Leadership	22
5. Partnership	23
6. Accountability to crisis-affected communities	24
6.1 Findings from community consultations	24
6.2 Findings from interviews and questionnaires	26
7. Effect of reforms on humanitarian response	27
8. Summary of conclusions	27
Table 1: Global clusters and cluster lead organisations	12
Table 2: NGO participation in federal-level cluster meetings	14
Table 3: Donors to Humanitarian Response Fund: 2006-2008	19
Table 4: Summary of HRF grants: 2006-2008	20
Box 1: Time in coordination meetings	14
Annex 1: NGOs and Humanitarian Reform project	29

List of Acronyms

BCPR	Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery
CCCM	Camp Coordination and Management
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CHF	Common Humanitarian Fund
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSO law	The Charities and Societies Proclamation
CTC	Community Therapeutic Care
DAG	Donor Assistance Group
DfID	UK Department for International Development
DPPA	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Agency
DPPB	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureau
DPPC	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission
DMFSS	Disaster Management and Food Security Sector
DRC	The Democratic Republic of the Congo
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Aid Department
EHCT	Ethiopia Humanitarian Country Team
ENCU	Emergency Nutrition Coordination Unit
ERC	Emergency Relief Coordinator
ERF	Emergency Response Fund
EWRD	Early Warning and Response Directorate
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HRF	Humanitarian Response Fund
HRO	Humanitarian Reform Officer
IASC	Inter-Agency Steering Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
INGO	International Non Governmental Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
MANTF	Multi-Agency Nutrition Task Force
MoARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
POLR	Provider of Last Resort
PSNP	Productive Safety Net Programme
RC/HC	Resident Coordinator and/or Humanitarian Coordinator
RHB	Regional Health Board
SNNPR	Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDSS	United Nations Department of Safety and Security
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Executive Summary

Since 2005, donors and the UN system have worked together to introduce a set of reforms to improve the timeliness, coverage and predictability of international humanitarian response. The process has focused on three elements:

- The cluster approach;
- Strengthened humanitarian coordinators; and
- Pooled humanitarian funding.

In 2007, the UN added partnership as a fourth element.

Although Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) implement the majority of humanitarian programmes at field level, this humanitarian reform process has tended to focus on the UN system and NGOs have found it difficult to participate in the new co-ordination and financing systems. Therefore, the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform project is a three-year project, funded by the UK Department for International Development (DfID), to increase the engagement of NGOs (international and national/local) in the humanitarian reform process. The consortium implementing the project commissioned a 'mapping' study in each country where the project will be implemented. The aim was to provide baseline data, against which the project can measure progress, as well as guidance to consortium members on country-specific activities. The consortium will then appoint a Humanitarian Reform Officer in each country to carry out project activities.

The mapping studies covered each of the project's headings of coordination, funding, leadership, partnership, accountability to beneficiaries and the impact of the reform process on humanitarian response. The findings from Ethiopia are summarised below. Recommendations are listed under the appropriate headings at the end of the section.

Coordination

The Ethiopian government is keen to play a strong role in coordinating and overseeing humanitarian response so it established sectoral Emergency Task Forces. However, the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) felt that it would be useful to introduce the cluster approach as well. So, following a workshop with the government and other humanitarian actors in March, this was done in May 2007. However, there was some confusion (even amongst UN agencies) about the added value of clusters and how they fit with the pre-existing Task Forces. One reason for the potential duplication is that there is no explicit Inter-Agency Steering Committee guidance on how to involve government bodies in clusters, in countries where they have the capacity to participate. As a result, International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) felt that there were too many coordination meetings and their purpose is not always clear. In view of these concerns about the effectiveness of coordination meetings, the study identified the factors that could improve their functioning and provide incentives for greater NGO participation. These are listed in section 2.3.

The Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector is one exception where there appeared to be a clear distinction between the membership and role of the Task Force and cluster. Interviewees also deemed the Multi-Agency Nutrition Task Force (MANTF), chaired by the Emergency Nutrition Coordination Unit (ENCU), to be an effective coordination body. The ENCU is a government body but UNICEF finances its staff members.

International NGOs participate in coordination meetings far more than Ethiopian NGOs. So while 7-20 INGOs attend federal coordination meetings, only 2-6 Ethiopian NGOs attend them. According to government interviewees, this is partly due to the limited involvement of Ethiopian NGOs in humanitarian response and partly because they lack the technical expertise and time to participate.

In 2008, the UN decided to allow NGOs to participate in the Ethiopia Humanitarian Country Team (EHCT). Three INGOs and an NGO umbrella body (that has both national and international members) are now members. INGOs have welcomed their inclusion in the EHCT but there are two main challenges to their participation. The first is that they are not involved in the UN's preparatory meetings, which excludes them from much of the discussion and decision-making. The second is limited staff time to engage with the key issues that should be raised and discussed by the Country Team, prepare background papers etc. The INGOs feel that, to be successful, the EHCT requires sustained commitment from all members, particularly the HC, but that this was missing in 2008. However, they hope that their efforts to get the UN/HC to revitalise their engagement will mean that the EHCT functions better in 2009.

Funding

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) established the Humanitarian Response Fund (HRF) at the request of donors and it started operating in March 2006. Its aim is "to cover emergency requirements in areas where there are gaps in humanitarian response by providing UN Agencies and NGOs with a rapid and flexible funding mechanism to meet short-term emergency priorities of vulnerable communities."

The HRF received around US\$68 million in donor contributions in 2008. This is a substantial increase on 2006-07 funding levels of US\$13-15 million and an indication that donors find it a useful mechanism. NGOs, too, have found the HRF quick and responsive, faster than some official donors. Interviewees involved in coordination mechanisms (such as MANTF and the Child Survival Task Force) pointed to the HRF as a useful mechanism for financing gap-filling activities. The ENCU in particular cited cases when it had approached OCHA jointly with an INGO about the possibility of funding much-needed nutrition programmes. In 2008, the HRF allocated just under US\$45 million to projects, leaving a balance of around US\$30 million to be carried over to 2009 (it also carried over approximately US\$9 million from 2007).

It is unusual for a humanitarian fund to have large balances at the end of the year. According to OCHA, one explanation is that donors pay their contributions late in the year. In 2008, the HRF received US\$36 million (over half of contributions) in the last quarter of the year even though the drought crisis began in May. Another factor is that the HRF is demand-driven – it responds to proposals as it receives them – and, according to OCHA, it did not receive many applications at the end of 2008. Although pooled humanitarian funds are supposed to increase the timeliness of funding, clearly this is not possible if donor contributions arrive so late that there is no longer an immediate requirement for them.

The HRF finances both UN agencies and NGOs. INGOs have received the larger share of HRF funding, as high as 77% in 2007. The average size of grants to the UN has been larger, but the average size of INGO grants has increased gradually from US\$343,399 in 2006 to US\$475,462 in 2008. HRF guidelines do not distinguish between Ethiopian and international NGOs but, in practice, the HRF does not finance Ethiopian NGOs directly. INGO members of the Review Board suggested that this is because the Board has decided to finance only organisations with a turnover of more than US\$2 million (although this is not stated anywhere in the HRF's rules). This criterion is not an appropriate indication of an NGO's effectiveness so the HRF should select partners on the basis of their "comparative advantage in responding to identified humanitarian needs", as stated in its guidelines.

There are three INGOs on the HRF Review Board while the Ethiopian Red Cross represents local NGOs. Although one INGO is supposed to be replaced each year, since the HRF's inception, only one INGO has been replaced. One of the difficulties with securing active

NGO participation on the Board is that most do not have the staff time for a potentially intensive process of involvement.

Following an evaluation in 2006, the Review Board decided to include a government representative. There were mixed views about the value of this. Due to the government restructuring, the government representative has stopped attending Board meetings. A couple of NGO interviewees believed that it would be more helpful to have donors on the HRF Review Board, to bring their experience and also balance to the discussions. However, there is a limited donor capacity for engagement with pooled funding mechanisms.

OCHA organised a Policy Review Workshop in November 2008 to discuss a broad range of issues with Review Board members. One of these was whether the HRF should initiate 'calls for proposals' in order to be more strategic and predictable. Some of the discussions reflect the concern of NGOs on the HRF Review Board that UN proposals are not scrutinised as closely as NGO applications and that UN agencies do not comply adequately with HRF reporting requirements.

Leadership

Leadership proved to be an important issue in Ethiopia, mainly because of INGO concerns about the lack of adequate UN leadership on access and upholding humanitarian principles in the Somali region. The HC acknowledged the problem but felt that he had been as frank with the government about these difficult issues as possible. This tension over advocacy on humanitarian issues highlights the problem of a dual-hatted Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator (in other words, a single person who fulfils both roles). While the RC's priority is to work and maintain a good relationship with the host government, the HC is the champion of the humanitarian community as a whole. As such, s/he can be more challenging about government failures to respect humanitarian space.

Although HCs are ultimately responsible for country-level pooled funds, in Ethiopia, the HC does not chair or attend Review Board meetings. His involvement is limited to signing project agreements approved by the Review Board. This means that he misses the opportunity to engage in the discussions of the humanitarian situation, and appropriate responses, that take place during Board meetings. It also means that it is left to OCHA to be the neutral arbiter because almost all the organisations on the Board also receive HRF funding and therefore face conflicts of interest.

Partnership

There is limited partnership between international and Ethiopian NGOs in the arena of humanitarian aid (other than through church networks). This may be due to the small number of Ethiopian NGOs involved in providing humanitarian aid as well as concerns that many Ethiopian NGOs have political affiliations. There was also limited evidence of INGOs building the capacity of Ethiopian NGOs. According to regional ENCU interviewees in Awassa, UN agencies and INGOs have not supported local NGOs to play a stronger role in the Child Survival Task Force (such as partnering with them to enable them to access HRF funding).

Many interviewees highlighted the lack of trust across the full range of humanitarian organisations. But they also made it clear that, despite the serious obstacles to partnerships between humanitarian organisations, these are vital for addressing issues of humanitarian access and security in the Somali region as well as delivering effective assistance in general.

The passing of The Charities and Societies Proclamation, or 'CSO law' has cast a shadow over relations between the government and international NGOs. The government restructuring has also made it difficult for both UN agencies and INGOs to identify suitable

interlocutors. However, as the government's new disaster management policy and structures become clearer, these could provide opportunities for renewed engagement.

Accountability to crisis-affected communities

In the limited timeframe for the mapping study, it was only possible to undertake three visits to crisis-affected communities. Two of these were in the Somali region, where humanitarian agencies have very restricted access. The communities visited were benefiting from only one humanitarian programme each. This made it difficult to comment on the coordination or quality of humanitarian response, other than to highlight its limited nature, compared with the needs expressed by the communities.

INGO staff members said that they had mechanisms in place to consult beneficiaries, particularly about needs. But government interviewees maintained that INGO projects were donor-driven. They argued that they had little knowledge of projects even though they sign project agreements. One government representative believed that INGO projects also lacked the flexibility to respond to changing needs because they were based on donor priorities instead of community realities.

Effect of reforms on humanitarian response

As with accountability to beneficiaries, the limited humanitarian response in the sites visited made it difficult to say definitively whether reform mechanisms have improved the timeliness, predictability and effectiveness of humanitarian response. The problem is compounded by the fact that the main weaknesses of the humanitarian system are the lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation and the lack of a transparent sharing of project implementation information. This means that there is a lack of evidence linking the work of clusters and funding through the CERF and the HRF to humanitarian programmes. This points to the need for a systematic approach to assessing how the different pillars of the reform fit together and tracking what influence they have had on response.

Despite its small size, the HRF team tries to undertake at least one monitoring visit to the NGO projects that it funds. This provides independent information on project implementation and, possibly, an incentive for timely implementation, though the HRF team does not monitor UN projects. The Review Board is assessing how to put in place more consistent evaluation procedures to complement monitoring data.

Recommendations

This section draws together the recommendations made under each of the study's headings.

Coordination

- In the absence of global IASC guidance on how to involve government Ministries in clusters, it would be helpful if the Ethiopia Humanitarian Country Team (EHCT) could develop country-level guidance.
- The EHCT should examine how to streamline the cluster system so that it does not duplicate the work of Task Forces. The NGOs and Humanitarian Reform project could contribute to the process by getting the Humanitarian Reform Officer (HRO) to undertake a review of the implementation of the cluster approach in Ethiopia and contribute lessons learnt from the introduction of the cluster approach in other contexts. This has been done in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and resulted in a constructive report and engagement with the HC on improving the cluster approach.
- Cluster meeting convenors should follow the basic good practice highlighted in section 2.3 to maximise their value. This would help reduce the INGO perception that they spend too much time in coordination meetings and that these are not effective enough.

- UN members of the EHCT should ensure that NGOs are involved in preparatory meetings so that they can participate in discussions and decisions more fully.
- Since some consortium members are represented on the EHCT, the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform project should monitor the EHCT's effectiveness as a coordination mechanism and a forum for reflecting the views of the NGO community.
- To implement the cluster approach successfully, UN agencies need to follow UNICEF's lead in investing in appointing staff members with cluster coordination responsibilities in their job description, providing adequate training on managing meetings and ensuring that staff members are assessed for their performance in managing clusters.
- International organisations should explore ways to support Ethiopian NGOs to participate more consistently in coordination mechanisms. The HRO could be a valuable resource for local NGOs as well by sharing information on reform processes.

Funding

- Since country-level pooled funds are often the only source of direct funding for local NGOs, it would be helpful if the HRF started providing direct grants to Ethiopian NGOs (like similar funds in other countries). If it is concerned about the accountability of other local NGOs, the HRF can start with small grants until the organisation has demonstrated its capacity to manage funds. Also, the HRF team already has performance information about the local NGOs that have received funding through INGO partners and could get further information if these organisations are partners of Review Board members.
- Given that the HRF Review Board is already discussing the option of more predictable, strategic funding, it would be helpful for it to assess whether the current 6-month timeframe is appropriate or whether the HRF needs to support a mixture of quick-response, short-term projects and longer-term projects for more chronic needs.
- The timeliness of donor payments clearly has a significant impact on the HRF's ability to respond to needs in a timely way so the Review Board should monitor the timing of donor contributions and work with OCHA/the HC to advocate for improvements, if necessary.
- The HC and HRF team should ensure parity between accountability and reporting standards for NGOs and UN agencies. If an NGO applicant can be refused funding because it has not complied with HRF rules (e.g., on reporting), the same should apply to UN agencies.

Leadership

- There is a clear need for INGOs and UN agencies to build bridges around humanitarian concerns. The EHCT may offer a forum for this, if the HC and UN agencies make a concerted effort. Alternatively, the HC could consider having regular meetings with INGOs to hear and address their concerns.
- It would be helpful if the HC increased his engagement with the HRF by participating in Review Board discussions.

Partnership

- A key role for this project will be to build trust, or at least greater cooperation, amongst humanitarian actors, starting with consortium members.
- It would be helpful if international NGOs could explore ways of cooperating with Ethiopian NGOs on humanitarian issues. Consortium members could start by pooling knowledge and experience of their partners and those financed by the HRF and use this to start a dialogue.
- The government's new disaster management policy, with its focus on reducing the vulnerability of communities to natural hazards, offers an opportunity for international

organisations to engage with it. INGOs, in particular, are involved in providing both humanitarian and development assistance so such an approach raises the possibility of bringing different aspects of their own programmes closer together.

Accountability to crisis-affected communities

- Once appointed, the HRO should undertake more comprehensive visits to crisis-affected communities to assess the extent of humanitarian response and whether accountability mechanisms are effective.
- Consortium members could explore opportunities to cooperate in involving crisis-affected communities in needs assessments to ensure that communities are not subjected to multiple surveys and assessments.
- The project offers consortium members an opportunity to share best practice on involving beneficiaries in project implementation and monitoring activities.

Effect of reforms on humanitarian response

- It would be helpful if HRF monitoring were extended to all projects, NGO and UN.
- It would also be useful if the HC, as the person responsible for ensuring a timely, coordinated response, commissioned a country-level evaluation on how the different elements of the reform process are working together.

Introduction

Following a visit to Darfur in 2004, the then UK Secretary of State for International Development, Hilary Benn, highlighted the need to strengthen the humanitarian system because “*vulnerable people deserve much better of us than we have given them in Darfur*”¹. He called for six elements of reform:

- More, and more flexible, funding to be available right from the moment crisis strikes;
- Better and stronger Humanitarian Coordinators, with the power and the funds to act;
- Greater clarity about who does what in a crisis;
- The development of benchmarks to measure how we perform;
- Addressing unequal allocation of resources between crises; and
- More investment in reducing the risk of future disasters.

Around the same time, the UN’s Emergency Response Coordinator, Jan Egeland, commissioned the Humanitarian Response review, which was published in August 2005². It focused on the UN system only and the authors noted that while the review provided “*a fairly good picture of the UN family*” it did not provide such a picture of “*the NGO community and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement*” (p. 8). The review made 36 recommendations that were used as the basis for the Humanitarian Reform project that was managed by the OCHA Humanitarian Reform Support Unit in Geneva. These recommendations were converted into three ‘pillars’ of UN humanitarian reform:

- The cluster approach;
- Strengthened humanitarian coordinators; and
- Pooled humanitarian funding.

Partnership is sometimes added as a fourth pillar or is sometimes described as an overall enabler for the other reforms³.

Although NGOs implement the majority of humanitarian programmes at field level, this humanitarian reform process has tended to focus on the UN system and NGOs have faced various obstacles to their engagement in the new co-ordination and financing processes. In 2008, a consortium of six international NGOs and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) responded to a funding call from DfID and developed a 3-year project entitled ‘NGOs and Humanitarian Reform’. The project aims to increase the effectiveness of humanitarian response by strengthening the effective engagement of international, national and local NGOs in humanitarian reform processes. For further details of the project, see Annex 1.

The NGO consortium commissioned independent researchers to undertake ‘mapping’ studies in the five countries where they intended to implement the project. These are: Afghanistan, the DRC, Ethiopia, Sudan and Zimbabwe. The aim of the studies is to provide baseline data, against which the project can measure progress, as well as guidance to consortium members on country-specific activities. To ensure comparability across the studies, the researchers developed a common set of questions under the project’s headings of coordination, funding, accountability to crisis-affected communities and partnership. The

¹ H. Benn (2004) *Reform of the International Humanitarian System* Speech by Hilary Benn, UK Secretary of State for International Development at ODI, 15 December 2004. Available from:

<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/news/files/Speeches/bennaidssystemreform.asp>

² See C. Adinolfi, Bassiouni, D. S., Lauritzsen, H. F., & Williams, H. R. (2005) *Humanitarian Response Review: An independent report commissioned by the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator & Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs* OCHA, New York. Available from:

<http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/content/documents/other/Humanitarian%20Response%20Review%202005.pdf>

³ OCHA (2007) *The Four Pillars of Humanitarian Reform*. OCHA, New York 23 September 2007). Available from: http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/srilanka/docs/hum_re/The_humanitarian_reform-Four_Pillars.pdf

consortium will use the findings from the mapping studies to advocate for change at a global level. It will also appoint a Humanitarian Reform Officer to undertake project activities.

The mapping studies have found that humanitarian reforms have been introduced to a different extent in each country. Ethiopia is about midway between the DRC, where all the reforms have been tested, and Afghanistan, where the cluster system is very new and there are no pooled humanitarian financing mechanisms because it was deemed a post-crisis country shortly after the fall of the Taliban in 2001. In Ethiopia, the Humanitarian Response Fund (HRF) began operating in March 2006 and the UN introduced the cluster approach in May 2007. As sections 2 and 3 demonstrate, interviewees felt that the HRF is working well but had more concerns about the effectiveness of the cluster system and how it related to pre-existing coordination mechanisms.

This report is based on a 16-day visit to Ethiopia. One consortium member is the lead agency in each of the mapping study countries. In Ethiopia, this is Save the Children UK and the country visit would not have been possible without its superb logistical support. Given the project's focus on accountability to beneficiaries and assessing whether the reforms have resulted in improvements to humanitarian response, after a week of interviews in Addis Ababa, I spent a week visiting two drought-affected areas outside Addis Ababa – the town of Awassa in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR) and Shinile district in the Somali region (which included interviews in the regional capital, Jijiga). I then returned to Addis Ababa for a day of further interviews and to present a feedback workshop. As with the other mapping studies, the interviews were supplemented by emailing a questionnaire to international and local NGOs. Unfortunately, only five INGOs in Ethiopia responded to the questionnaire. For further details of the methodology, see Annex 2.

This report begins by outlining the elements of the context in Ethiopia that have direct relevance for humanitarian response. It then presents findings under the three pillars of humanitarian reform – coordination, funding and leadership – as well as under the project themes of partnership, accountability to beneficiaries and effect of the reforms on humanitarian response. To maintain a direct link between findings and recommendations, it presents the latter at the end of each section. However, it draws out some cross-cutting conclusions and recommendations at the end.

1. CONTEXT

Most humanitarian needs in Ethiopia are due to recurrent droughts and occasional floods. However, there is a conflict between the government and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) in the Somali region. Since May 2007, the conflict in 5 zones of the Somali region - Degahbur, Korahe, Warder, Fik and Gode – has severely restricted the movement of people and livestock and local and cross border trade. This has had a direct impact on the livelihoods of people in the area, including pastoralists⁴. Occasionally, there are sporadic outbreaks of violence in other parts of the country, due to tribal tensions or conflicts over access to resources. For example, according to OCHA's Humanitarian Bulletin of 25 August 2008, "Conflicts between clans over limited resources have been reported from Oromiya and Somali Regions. In Borena zone of Oromiya, people have been fighting over limited pasture and water resources".

For the purposes of this report and the project as a whole, it is important to separate findings in the Somali region from the rest of country because the nature of the humanitarian crisis there is different. The operating environment for humanitarian actors is also different in the Somali region because they are subject to severe restrictions. Despite their protection mandates, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations

⁴ For further details, see S. Healy (August 2007), *Conflict in the Ogaden and its Regional Dimension: A Horn of Africa Group Seminar Report*, Chatham House. Available from: <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/TBRL-76TQ2K?OpenDocument>

High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are unable to operate in the conflict-affected zones. Many humanitarian actors are careful about speaking out on contraventions of humanitarian principles because of the potential impact on their programmes and have had to weigh up the trade-off between continued access to beneficiaries and bearing witness.

After a couple of years of relatively good harvests, Ethiopia experienced a severe drought in 2008. In the Somali Region, it was the worst drought since 2001, after three consecutive rainy seasons failed⁵. The situation was compounded by the impact of high food and fuel prices. Through 2008, the government increased its estimate of the number of people in urgent need of emergency food aid from 2.2 to 4.6 and then to 6.4 million. This is in addition to approximately 7.5 million people receiving assistance under the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP)⁶. As the humanitarian requirements document issued by the government and humanitarian partners shows, humanitarian aid to Ethiopia is dominated by food aid. However, a number of interviewees suggested that this might not always be the most appropriate form of assistance.

Ethiopia is characterised by a very strong government that plays a key role in humanitarian coordination and also delivers some humanitarian aid, like food aid. The Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Agency (DPPA) at federal level and the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureau (DPPB) and the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (DPPC) at regional level used to manage humanitarian aid. However, the government has been in the process of completely reorganising this structure in the last 18 months or so and substantially reducing the number of government staff involved (by an estimated 40% or so, according to general consensus).

Together with this process of restructuring, the government is revising its humanitarian aid policy. Although drafts are not easily available, interviewees believe that this will place much greater emphasis on disaster risk reduction (DRR) and disaster prevention. Thus, the government is likely to take a more holistic, vulnerability-focused approach to recurring natural disasters, instead of simply responding to them⁷.

The Disaster Management and Food Security Sector (DMFSS) located in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MoARD) now coordinates humanitarian aid. The DMFSS has an Early Warning and Response Directorate (EWRD) that includes the Emergency Nutrition Coordination Unit (ENCU). This is responsible for overseeing nutritional assessments and ensuring that they follow government protocols and guidelines. It also chairs the Multi-Agency Nutrition Task Force and coordinates emergency nutritional responses. Since the DMFSS is the result of a merger between the DPPA and the Food Security Bureau, it also has a Food Security Department. This is supposed to improve the resilience of food-insecure and vulnerable households by putting in place an effective all-hazard early warning and response system⁸.

Despite putting in place disaster management structures, the government is understandably sensitive about how the international community perceives Ethiopia and does not want it to continue to be associated with pictures of severe famine, as it was in the 1980s. An NGO

⁵ According to OCHA (September 2008), *United Nations Humanitarian Chief Surveys Needs in Ethiopia's Drought-Stricken Somali Region: Press Release*. Available from: <http://www.ocha-eth.org/Reports/Reports2008.htm>

⁶ See OCHA (June 2008) *Situation Report: Drought/Food Crisis in Ethiopia – 13th June 2008* and OCHA (September 2008) *Focus on Ethiopia*. Available from <http://www.ocha-eth.org/>. The PSNP is an initiative by the Ethiopian government and donors to shift millions of chronically food-insecure rural people from recurrent emergency food aid to a more secure and predictable form of social protection. It was launched in 2005.

⁷ For a brief summary of the government's new disaster risk management strategy, see OCHA (January 2009) *Focus on Ethiopia*. Available from: <http://www.ocha-eth.org/Reports/downloadable/2008FocusonEthiopia.htm>

⁸ For further details of the government's Business Process Reengineering, see OCHA (September 2008) *Focus on Ethiopia*. Available from: <http://www.ocha-eth.org/Reports/downloadable/2008FocusonEthiopia.htm>

umbrella body representative pointed out that the government wants Ethiopia to be seen as a country that is growing and developing and it regards recurrent emergencies as contradictory to this process. As a result, nutrition assessments and numbers of people in need of emergency food aid are often a source of dispute between the government and aid agencies. For the same reason, the government has not encouraged Ethiopian NGOs to engage in humanitarian activities. Therefore, these NGOs tend not to specialise in humanitarian aid.

The legal environment for NGO activity in Ethiopia has varied over the years⁹. In 2008, the government introduced draft legislation titled The Charities and Societies Proclamation, which is commonly known as the CSO law. After a number of drafts and revisions, the Ethiopian Parliament adopted the law in early January 2009. This law classifies all NGOs and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) that receive more than 10% of their total funding from overseas as international organisations and bans activity by international organisations on gender equality, children's rights, disabled persons' rights and conflict resolution. Several interviewees expressed concerns about the impact of this law on the humanitarian work of NGOs and the level of self-censorship that the organisations had imposed even before it was passed.

Donor representatives in Ethiopia did advocate for amendments to the CSO law during 2008, to make it more supportive of NGO activity, but without success. There is a perception amongst interviewees (UN and NGO) that the largest donors were not as firm in their representations to the government as they could be because Ethiopia is a key regional ally. However, one donor interviewee pointed out that forcefulness is not necessarily effective in negotiations with the Ethiopian government.

NGOs also expressed concern that, due to the absence of major crises in the last two to three years, some donors have reduced their capacity to engage on humanitarian issues. The representative of one large donor did point out that they lack the capacity to administer many grants but another, smaller donor, argued that it remains very engaged with humanitarian issues even when channelling funds through the Humanitarian Response Fund. In Ethiopia, donors are not directly involved in reform mechanisms, i.e. they do not attend cluster or other coordination meetings and are not represented on the Humanitarian Response Fund Board.

2. COORDINATION

2.1 What is the cluster approach?¹⁰

The cluster approach is a coordination mechanism that is intended to prevent gaps in international humanitarian response and to ensure predictability and accountability in humanitarian response. It goes beyond previous coordination mechanisms like sector groups because it is intended to strengthen the effectiveness of humanitarian response by building partnerships in particular sectors, such as health or shelter. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee has designated certain UN agencies as responsible for 11 sectors at the global level (although non-UN agencies may jointly lead the cluster). Not all the sectors are relevant for every crisis so the country-level IASC or Humanitarian Country Team can decide which clusters to establish in a given situation. The table below summarises the sectors and cluster lead organisations at global level.

⁹ For an historical perspective, see H. Tefferi and Y. Endeshaw (2008) *Review of the Enabling Environment for Local Civil Society Organisations in Ethiopia*. Save the Children UK Ethiopia Programme

¹⁰ This section is based on information available from:

<http://www.humanitarianreform.org/humanitarianreform/Default.aspx?tabid=70>

Sector	Global Cluster Lead(s)
Agriculture	FAO
Camp Coordination/Management (CCCM): Internationally Displaced Persons (IDPs) (conflict situations) Disaster situations	UNHCR IOM
Early Recovery	UNDP's BCPR
Education	UNICEF and Save the Children UK
Emergency Shelter: IDPs (conflict situations) Disaster situations	UNHCR IFRC (convener)
Emergency Telecommunications	OCHA/UNICEF/WFP
Health	WHO
Logistics	WFP
Nutrition	UNICEF
Protection: IDPs (conflict situations) Disasters/civilians affected by conflict (non-IDPs)	UNHCR UNHCR/OHCHR/UNICEF
Water, Sanitation and Hygiene	UNICEF

Table 1: Global clusters and cluster lead organisations
(please see Annex 3, page 31, for full list of acronyms)

Cluster leads are responsible for ensuring that response capacity is in place and that assessment, planning and response activities are carried out in collaboration with partners and in accordance with agreed standards and guidelines. Cluster leads are also expected to be the “provider of last resort” when no other organisation can respond to identified needs. At the global level, cluster leads are accountable to the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) for building up a more predictable and effective response capacity in line with IASC agreements. At the field level, in addition to their normal institutional responsibilities, cluster leads are accountable to Humanitarian Coordinators for fulfilling agreed roles and responsibilities, such as those listed in the *IASC Generic Terms of Reference for Sector/Cluster Leads at the Country Level*.

In accordance with General Assembly Resolution 46/182, the cluster approach acknowledges that a crisis-affected state has the primary role in the initiation, organisation, coordination, and implementation of humanitarian assistance. However, IASC guidance on the implementation of the cluster approach does not provide details of how to involve government bodies in clusters, where they have the capacity to participate and their involvement is desirable. Cluster leads are expected to “develop and maintain appropriate links with government and local authorities, state institutions, local civil society and other stakeholders”. But “the nature of these links will depend on the situation in each country and on the willingness of each of these actors to lead or participate in humanitarian activities”¹¹.

2.2 Cluster approach in Ethiopia

Given the government’s determination to coordinate and oversee humanitarian activities, it established sectoral Emergency Task Forces. However, the Humanitarian Coordinator felt that it would be useful to introduce the cluster approach as well and this was done in May 2007. The UN organised a joint workshop with the government in March 2007 to discuss the implementation of clusters with government ministries, UN agencies, NGOs and the Red Cross Movement. Despite this, there has been some confusion about the added value of clusters and how they fit with the pre-existing Task Force system. This is true even amongst

¹¹ According to a document on Frequently Asked Questions about the cluster approach. Available from: www.humanitarianreform.org/humanitarianreform/Portals/1/cluster%20approach%20page/Kenya/Cluster_Approach-FAQ-NEW%5B2%5D.pdf

UN agencies, some of which feel that the cluster approach was introduced without adequate consultation with them. It has also led to a feeling amongst INGOs that there are too many coordination meetings and that their purpose is not always clear.

The WASH cluster is perhaps one exception. According to one interviewee, since the WASH Emergency Task Force is a large group (with over 45 NGOs represented), it is difficult to discuss strategic issues effectively. Therefore, Task Force members have selected key NGOs to participate in the WASH cluster, which is co-chaired by the Ministry of Water and UNICEF (as is the Task Force). The cluster meets immediately before the Task Force and its decisions are fed back to the wider group. At the time of the field visit, the cluster was preparing a guidance note on its mandate.

The Protection Cluster has tried to fill a gap in the existing coordination system. When the UN introduced the cluster approach in Ethiopia, there was no government counterpart on protection and displacement issues¹². At the time of the field visit, the cluster had not received government recognition and operated informally with UN and INGO participants. Cluster members had not made a conscious decision to exclude Ethiopian NGOs but their absence arose partly from a need for the international community to 'sort itself out' and partly from the cluster lead person's assumption that local NGOs did not participate in any clusters. Since it did not have government authorisation, the cluster had developed its terms of reference (TOR) to focus mainly on coordinating response to cases of displacement. Also, there were few organisations working on protection issues like female genital mutilation and sexual and gender-based violence in each part of the country so there seemed to be little to coordinate. Furthermore, these activities are being undertaken as part of development programmes so there is a question about whether it is within the cluster's remit to coordinate them.

According to a government representative, the government initially welcomed the cluster approach because it assumed that it would enable the UN to organise itself and identify a focal institution with which the government could engage on different sectoral issues like health, water and sanitation, or logistics. However, he felt that the cluster approach had been taken beyond the government's understanding of it, leading to a level of discomfort. This may be because the government has not been able to engage with the clusters actively (due to the restructuring of its disaster management function), and because the UN is perceived as having used clusters to increase its access to resources. The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) evaluation has pointed out that *'the fact that there is ambiguity on whether or not government personnel should be part of clusters, and if so, in what role, makes the entire concept difficult to roll out in situations where sectoral coordination with government participation already exists'* (CERF Two Year Evaluation, pg. 55). This suggests that the Ethiopian government's main problem with the cluster approach is the inherent assumption that humanitarian aid is provided in the absence of the affected state's government and the consequent failure to take account of government structures.

The government's concern about the cluster approach may also be based on the fact that, due to government restructuring, some Task Forces have not been functioning regularly and clusters have replaced them to some extent (in some cases, like WASH, the Emergency Task Forces were only activated in times of crisis). However, in the case of the Agriculture Task Force, there has been no regular coordination mechanism because FAO has not had the staff and resources to establish a regular coordination mechanism to fill the gap left by the absence of the Task Force. Instead, FAO has convened 'cluster' meetings, without TOR or a formal structure, on an ad hoc basis.

¹² Letter from the HC to John Holmes on the roll-out of the Cluster approach, 29 March 2007. Available from: <http://www.humanitarianreform.org/Default.aspx?tabid=568>

Meetings	International NGOs	Ethiopian NGOs
Health Task Force (HTF)	12	3
Water and Sanitation (WASH)	10	3
Agriculture Task Force (ATF)	20	6
Food Aid Task Force (FATF)	7	2
Multi-Agency Nutrition Task Force (MANTF)	11	2
Education Cluster	8	3
Methodology (selective org.)	4	none
Logistics	Ad hoc meetings called - no fixed participants list	
Protection	Ad hoc meetings called - no fixed participants list	
Early Recovery - UN/Govt.	none	none

Table 2: NGO Participation in federal-level cluster meetings. *Source: OCHA*

The Multi-Agency Nutrition Task Force (MANTF) is supposed to be chaired by the EWRD though, in practice, it tends to be chaired by the ENCU. Although the ENCU is part of the government, UNICEF pays for its staff members. The ENCU plays an important role in coordination, not just at federal level (with nutrition assessments) but also at regional level. It leads the Child Survival Task Force, based in Awassa, together with the Regional Health Bureau (RHB). A number of INGO interviewees cited this as an example of a very successful coordination mechanism. The ENCU believes that this is because it has the authority to get an NGO to provide assistance in areas of need or to take responsibility for a particular woreda (district) from one NGO that lacks adequate capacity and assign it to another.

Box 1: Time in coordination meetings

The timing of coordination meetings varies. For example, the MANTF meets once a month when the situation is stable and fortnightly during periods of emergency though it can also convene ad hoc meetings to discuss urgent matters. The WASH Cluster meets fortnightly.

The INGOs that responded to the questionnaire estimate that their staff spend anything between 5-16 hours a week in coordination meetings.

The regional ENCU also convenes an Early Warning Working Group. This collects nutrition data on a weekly and monthly basis and identifies hotspot areas and then feeds this into the Task Force. Additionally, the ENCU leads or supports nutrition assessments that humanitarian organisations can use to provide assistance. Thus, the ENCU has a range of different functions that contribute to its coordination role.

UN agencies, INGOs, DPPB, the RHB and, sometimes, the water bureau participate in the Child Survival Task Force. Local NGOs do not participate because very few of them are involved in nutrition programmes (as noted in section 1, Ethiopian NGOs have a limited involvement in humanitarian assistance). According to the ENCU, some faith-based local NGOs do undertake therapeutic supplementary feeding programmes but they are reluctant to engage with the Task Force because they focus on very specific kebeles (the ward or neighbourhood where their congregations are based) and are not interested in covering full woredas. ENCU interviewees believed that they also lack the technical expertise and time to participate. As a result, the ENCU has little information on their work and capacities and the potential duplication of efforts. The lack of trust between the government and local NGOs may be an additional explanation for their absence from coordination mechanisms. This is discussed further under partnership.

2.3 Coordination Effectiveness

The functioning of mechanisms like the Child Survival Task Force may have contributed to the perception amongst INGO interviewees in Addis Ababa that regional coordination is more effective than coordination mechanisms at the federal level. It may also be because, as one respondent pointed out, issues often become politicised as they move away from local field realities. While one consortium member felt that coordination meetings at federal level are still useful for getting to know other actors, particularly if the convenor makes contact lists available, another INGO interviewee argued that participants are wary of sharing information openly in such fora, so bilateral meetings are far more effective for coordination and exchanging ideas. In light of these views, it is not surprising that, when asked to rate the effectiveness of coordination meetings on a scale of 1-5 (with 1 as not effective at all and 5 as highly effective), three of the five respondents to the questionnaire rated them at 2, one at 3 and only one rated them at 4.

From the interviews and questionnaires, it is possible to identify several factors that contribute to the success of a coordination mechanism and which provide incentives for INGOs to participate:

- **Leadership**, including the authority to ensure that the right participants attend and gaps in humanitarian provision are identified and filled. In the Somali region, the government emphasises to NGOs the importance of attending monthly coordination meeting.
- **Committed organising**: someone whose job it is to convene meetings regularly and ensure follow-up. This is one of the reasons for the success of the WASH cluster in Addis Ababa.
- Meetings that go **beyond information sharing** and **result in decisions** that are followed up at subsequent meetings. Some interviewees expressed concern that some meetings were no longer very useful because they had become politicised, so participants were not even willing to share information openly and have frank discussions of the challenges they were encountering.
- Meetings that are **clearly structured** with **minutes circulated** afterwards. OCHA has information on running effective meetings on its website but a number of interviewees pointed out its coordination meetings failed to discuss real challenges and some meetings were unclear in their purpose and had no agendas.
- A **willingness to engage** amongst **government staff members** and adequate resources to enable them to organise meetings effectively. This was cited as one of the reasons for the success of the Child Survival Task Force.

The importance of sharing minutes widely was underlined by INGOs that are operating in remote areas. They find it very difficult to attend meetings in regional capitals and, if they do not have access to meeting minutes, they are excluded from coordination altogether. Recognising this, in Jijiga, the government recently started emailing minutes from monthly coordination meetings. Access to security information is also critical for INGOs operating in the Somali region and, at the time of the study, INGOs and the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) were discussing how best to ensure that NGOs receive reliable and timely security information.

In the context of government-led coordination, one consortium member suggested that UN agencies could do more to support capacity building within government ministries. In cases where the UN has seconded staff to ministries, coordination improves because there is someone dedicated to convening meetings, recording and distributing minutes etc. However, once this person leaves, the government's coordination function falters because capacities have not been transferred.

One UN agency argued that the government's lack of investment in its own capacity for coordination was a problem. This left UN agencies giving 'top-up' payments to staff members in government departments. His agency was forced to stop paying the head of the relevant Task Force and two assistants after an internal audit. But this meant that these government employees stopped running the Task Force. He pointed out that the practise is widespread (with one government ministry sending official requests for payments which can range from US\$250-\$3,000 a month). Different UN agencies have different policies and he felt that this was an issue that needed to be discussed openly and resolved because of its direct impact on the government's involvement in coordination. However, funding is not the only difficulty. The high level of staff turnover, particularly in the Somali region and even in other regions, is a real challenge to continuity and the effectiveness of coordination mechanisms.

Amongst UN agencies, UNICEF has invested the most in coordination, ensuring that staff members leading clusters have this role in their job description and that at least part of their performance assessment focuses on how they have fulfilled this role. This is clearly one of the factors in the success of the WASH cluster. One UNICEF staff member explained that he had been on a course, held in Nairobi, explaining the cluster approach, how to run meetings, communication with members etc. This is clearly critical for all cluster leads but he was keen to get further training, to participate in a more structured and detailed course on implementing the clusters.

2.4 *Provider of Last Resort*

While most discussions of the cluster approach focus on coordination, the Provider of Last Resort (POLR) role is more problematic. There has been an assumption that, by taking on this role, UN agencies are committing themselves to being operational. However, UN agencies can be more creative in fulfilling this role by supporting organisations that are already present on the ground. According to the TOR for cluster lead agencies, they must try to ensure that all humanitarian needs in their respective sectors are met, by any appropriate means¹³. These means can include:

- facilitating the deployment of capable actors working near the area that needs a response
- pre-positioning stock to ensure that a response can be rapid
- providing food, medicines or non-food items
- advocating and coordinating with donors so that sufficient, appropriate funding is targeted at areas where there are the most needs.

Therefore, implementing a response directly is only one of several options available to the agencies for fulfilling their POLR responsibilities. For example, an INGO that focuses on health pointed out that WHO is not operational in most countries and has to work through NGOs in emergency situations.

The role is even more challenging for UN agencies in Ethiopia, where the government regards itself as leading on emergency response. The World Food Programme (WFP) implements its programmes through government counterparts rather than NGOs (with the exception of urban HIV/AIDS activities). This is problematic when there are allegations that food distributions are not reaching the intended beneficiaries, particularly in conflict-affected parts of the country¹⁴. It also raises questions about what the POLR role means in contexts

¹³ The Global TOR for Sector/Cluster Leads at the Country Level are available from: www.humanitarianreform.org/humanitarianreform/Default.aspx?tabid=218. Also see the 2006 'IASC Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach to Strengthen Humanitarian Response', pgs 10-11.

¹⁴ WFP has established the 'Hubs and Spokes' system in the five conflict-affected areas of the Somali region to be able to monitor food distributions better and try to ensure that targeted beneficiaries receive food in a timely manner.

where the government is strong but has difficulties with providing aid in a neutral and effective way.

2.5 *Other coordination mechanisms*

Government opposition to the inclusion of NGOs prevented the establishment of an IASC at country-level but, in 2008, the UN decided to allow NGOs to participate in the Ethiopia Humanitarian Country Team (EHCT). Three INGOs and an NGO umbrella body (that has both national and international members) are now members. It is supposed to meet monthly but is not always regular. When the EHCT is due to meet, the INGO representatives consult with the wider INGO community to ensure that they raise issues of concern to all.

While the INGOs have welcomed their inclusion in the EHCT, there are two main challenges to their participation. The first is that they are not involved in the UN's preparatory meetings, which excludes them from much of the discussion and decision-making. The second is limited staff time to engage with the key issues that should be raised and discussed by the Country Team, prepare background papers etc. The INGOs feel that, to be successful, the EHCT requires sustained commitment from all members, particularly the HC, but that this was missing in 2008. However, they hope that their efforts to get the UN/HC to revitalise their engagement will mean that the EHCT functions better in 2009.

Donors also have a coordination mechanism called the Donor Assistance Group (DAG). This meets monthly with the HC/RC and has working groups to focus on particular issues. This includes a Humanitarian Working Group but this has not been meeting regularly so there was a concern amongst INGOs that they did not have a donor forum with which to raise humanitarian concerns.

Recommendations:

- Ethiopia is a context where there is a strong government that has an important role in coordination. In the absence of global IASC guidance on how to involve government Ministries in clusters, it would be helpful if the Ethiopia Humanitarian Country Team (EHCT) could develop country-level guidance.
- The EHCT should examine how to streamline the cluster system so that it does not duplicate the work of Task Forces. The NGOs and Humanitarian Reform project could contribute to the process by getting the Humanitarian Reform Officer (HRO) to undertake a review of the implementation of the cluster approach in Ethiopia and contribute lessons learnt from the introduction of the cluster approach in other contexts. This has been done in the DRC and resulted in a constructive report and engagement with the HC on improving the cluster approach.
- Cluster meeting convenors should follow the basic good practice highlighted earlier to maximise their value. This would help reduce the INGO perception that they spend too much time in coordination meetings and that these are not effective enough.
- UN members of the EHCT should ensure that NGOs are involved in preparatory meetings so that they can participate in discussions and decisions more fully.
- Since some consortium members are represented on the EHCT, the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform project should monitor the EHCT's effectiveness as a coordination mechanism and a forum for reflecting the views of the NGO community.
- To implement the cluster approach successfully, UN agencies need to follow UNICEF's lead in investing in appointing staff members with cluster coordination responsibilities in their job description, providing adequate training on managing meetings and ensuring that staff members are assessed for their performance in managing clusters.
- International organisations should explore ways to support Ethiopian NGOs to participate more consistently in coordination mechanisms. The HRO could be a

valuable resource for local NGOs as well by sharing information on reform processes.

3. FUNDING

In order to ensure that humanitarian financing is more timely, flexible and needs-based, the General Assembly approved the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) on 15 December 2005. The CERF's objectives are:

- to promote early action and response to reduce loss of life;
- to enhance response to time-critical requirements; and
- to strengthen core elements of humanitarian response in under-funded crises.

The CERF aims to provide up to US\$500 million a year. This comprises a grant facility of up to US\$450 million and a loan facility of US\$50 million. The grant component has two windows: one for rapid response and one for under-funded emergencies. The CERF can only finance UN agencies and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) directly. The Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) manages the CERF with support from OCHA.

Donors also decided to establish country-level pooled funds, the Common Humanitarian Funds (CHF), as part of the reform process. The CHFs have been piloted in Sudan and the DRC and a third fund now operates in the Central African Republic. The Humanitarian Coordinator manages CHFs, with support from OCHA on programmatic issues and UNDP as financial administrator. CHFs are designed to finance needs identified in an annual humanitarian plan.

Emergency or Humanitarian Response Funds (ERFs or HRFs) are also country-level pooled humanitarian funds that have existed since 1997. They aim to enable mainly NGOs (which cannot access the CERF) and UN agencies to respond quickly and effectively to unforeseen humanitarian needs. The Humanitarian Coordinator manages these funds with support from OCHA, which is the financial administrator. An advisory board reviews project proposals and recommends whether the Humanitarian Coordinator should fund them or not. Although these mechanisms pre-date the introduction of humanitarian reforms, they have been incorporated into the process since they support reform objectives.

There are two main differences between CHFs and ERFs/HRFs. One is that the CHFs are focused on financing humanitarian needs incorporated into an annual humanitarian plan (or projects that contribute to plan objectives) while ERFs/HRFs respond to unforeseen needs. The other difference is the financial administrator – UNDP in the case of CHFs and OCHA in the case of ERFs/HRFs.

3.1 Humanitarian Funding in Ethiopia

Ethiopia was the second largest recipient of CERF funds in 2008, with a total of US\$31,528,040. Of this, approximately US\$21 million was from the rapid response window and the rest from the under-funded window. This was a substantial increase from 2007, when Ethiopia received US\$12.3 million in CERF funding.

OCHA established the Humanitarian Response Fund (HRF) at the request of donors and it started operating in March 2006. According to the HRF Briefing Kit, its aim is “to cover emergency requirements in areas where there are gaps in humanitarian response by providing UN Agencies and NGOs with a rapid and flexible funding mechanism to meet short-term emergency priorities of vulnerable communities. The objective is to provide initial funding so that humanitarian partners can respond to a crisis without delay. This fund is not intended to respond to chronic problems that could be better addressed through development funding channels¹⁵”.

¹⁵ Available from: <http://www.ocha-eth.org/hrf/index.html>

According to the HRF's guidelines in the Briefing Kit, the HRF will accept funding applications only from UN and NGO humanitarian agencies. The guidelines do not distinguish between Ethiopian and international NGOs but, unlike HRFs in other countries, the Fund does not finance Ethiopian NGOs directly, only through INGO partners. INGO members of the Review Board suggested that this is because the Board has decided that the HRF should only finance organisations with a turnover of more than \$2 million (although this is not stated anywhere in the HRF's rules). It is odd for the HRF to use turnover as the measure of an NGO's effectiveness since NGOs do not exist to maximise income (unlike private companies), and INGOs would protest loudly if government donors or pooled funds began using turnover as a criterion for funding them. This requirement also contradicts the HRF guidelines, which state that the Fund will select partners on the basis of their "comparative advantage in responding to identified humanitarian needs".

The HRF responds to funding applications on an on-going basis. The funding procedure is as follows:

- INGO or UN agency submits application
- OCHA ensures that the applicant has provided all the required information and that the application meets HRF criteria
- OCHA forwards suitable applications to the relevant Task Force or cluster for a technical review
- Proposal may be revised in light of the vetting procedure
- Proposal is submitted to the Review Board
- Review Board may approve the application, ask for further clarifications/revisions or reject the application
- If the Review Board approves the application it is sent to the HC for signature

3.2 HRF funding data and operation

As Table 3 below shows, the HRF received around US\$68 million in donor contributions in 2008. This is a substantial increase on previous years, due to the drought, which led to a high level of humanitarian need. It is also a clear indication that donors find the HRF a useful channel. The HRF had a total of US\$77.3 million available in 2008 because it carried over almost US\$9 million from 2007 to 2008 (over half the 2007 total of US\$13.6 million). It allocated US\$44,891,283 to projects, leaving a balance of around US\$30 million to be carried over to 2009.

Donor	2006	2007	2008
Ireland			4,352,602
Italy			857,233
Netherlands	5,000,000	3,395,940	25,675,614
Norway	1,500,000	2,022,776	2,644,228
Spain			1,293,661
Sweden		577,564	4,090,487
Switzerland			689,853
UK	8,900,000	7,632,793	28,489,852
Total contributions	15,400,000	13,629,073	68,093,530
Balance brought forward			8,918,449
Miscellaneous			295,517
TOTAL	15,400,000	13,629,073	77,307,496

Table 3: Donors to Humanitarian Response Fund: 2006-2008, in US\$.

Source: OCHA, 2007 Annual Report and 2006 HRF Evaluation Report

It is unusual for a humanitarian fund to have such large balances at the end of the year. According to OCHA, one explanation is that donors pay their contributions late in the year. For example, the HRF received US\$36 million (over half) of the 2008 contributions of US\$68 million in the last quarter of the year even though the drought crisis began in May. Another factor is that the HRF is demand-driven – it responds to proposals as it receives them – and, according to OCHA, it did not receive many applications at the end of 2008. Although pooled humanitarian funds are supposed to increase the timeliness of funding, clearly this is not possible if donor contributions arrive so late that there is no longer an immediate requirement for them.

	2006		2007		2008	
	UN	INGO	UN	INGO	UN	INGO
Amount Received US\$	6,707,080	8,241,569	1,380,788	4,725,921	19,216,336	25,674,947
% of Total	45%	55%	23%	77%	43%	57%
Number of projects	8	24	3	13	11	54
Average grant size US\$	838,385	343,399	460,263	363,532	1,746,940	475,462

Table 4: Summary of HRF grants: 2006-2008

The HRF Annual Reports for 2006 and 2007 (available from <http://www.ocha-eth.org/hrf/index.html>) provide a list of individual grants. The list of grants for 2008 is available from OCHA Ethiopia. However, Table 4 above summarises the grants made from 2006-2008. Since the HRF does not fund Ethiopian NGOs directly, the table is divided into UN agencies (including IOM) and international NGOs. It shows that INGOs have received the larger share of HRF funding, as high as 77% in 2007. The average size of grants to the UN has been larger but the average size of INGO grants has increased gradually from US\$343,399 in 2006 to US\$475,462 in 2008.

INGO interviewees generally agreed that the HRF is quick and responsive. A few INGOs have even found it to be faster than bilateral donors like the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Department (ECHO) and the U.S. Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA). As Table 3 highlights, the HRF saw a very large increase in contributions in 2008. This has led to discussions about whether its rules need to be revised to expand its role and the types of activities that it finances. This should also help address the issue of carrying forward large sums of money. The HRF team convened a Policy Review Workshop in November 2008 to discuss a broad range of issues with Review Board members.

One of these was whether the HRF should initiate ‘calls for proposals’ in order to be more strategic and predictable. Although this did not cover the timeframe for HRF-funded activities, a UN interviewee argued that a six-month limit on HRF projects is unhelpful, particularly for agriculture-related projects. He pointed out that it is possible to negotiate more realistic timeframes with bilateral donors but the HRF’s rules force organisations to resort to ‘tricks’ like no-cost extensions. Unsurprisingly, participants in the policy review workshop discussed the topic of no-cost extensions. Also, as part of the funding application process, the Review Board has introduced the practice of reviewing an organisation’s past performance to examine if there is a trend of requests for no-cost extensions. An analysis of the extent to which UN agencies and NGOs request extensions and, more importantly, the reasons for the requests, should help inform a discussion of the timing of, and timeframe for, HRF funding.

The other issues that the policy review covered included:

- Governance (how to include the government without compromising the independence of funding decisions)
- Consulting the HC when the Review Board decides to make exceptions to established policy
- Limits on funding applications (this is currently set at US\$700,000 though the Review Board has made exceptions)
- Overhead charges
- Monitoring and evaluation, and the role of clusters (including how past performance should be factored into funding decisions)
- Establishing a grievance procedure for rejected applications.

The HRF team was to revise policies and procedures to reflect the discussions.

As reflected in some of the discussions at the HRF policy review workshop, NGO representatives on the HRF Review Board feel that NGO proposals are vetted much more intensely (even “ripped apart”) while UN proposals are not scrutinised to the same extent either in terms of quality or with regard to overhead and staff costs.

Currently, the HRF has different, more detailed, reporting requirements than the CERF. This includes a short monthly status update on projects. There is a general perception that UN agencies also do not report on HRF grants as fully as NGOs. For example, the Board has asked the HRF team to circulate a ‘performance matrix’ for applicants that have received HRF funding before, showing the status of previous projects, no-cost extensions requested, reports received etc. However, according to a Board member, the HRF team was only able to prepare these for NGOs because it does not have adequate reporting from UN agencies.

3.3 The HRF Review Board

There are three INGOs on the HRF Review Board, as well as the Ethiopian Red Cross, which represents local NGOs. INGOs have found their seats on the Board very useful for engaging with other humanitarian actors. Hence, an evaluation of the HRF in October 2006 recommended that INGO members of the Board should rotate to allow other INGOs similar opportunities. As a result, OCHA developed guidelines stating, “Every year one international NGO will be rotated off the Board and replaced with another agency”. However, since the HRF’s inception, only one INGO has been replaced on the Board. One of the difficulties with securing active NGO participation on the Board is that most do not have the staff time for a potentially intensive process of involvement. This is particularly true at times of crisis, when the HRF is processing several applications at once.

Following the 2006 evaluation, the Review Board decided to include a government representative. There were mixed views about the value of this. However, due to the government restructuring, the individual who used to attend Board meetings has stopped doing so.

A couple of NGO interviewees believed that it would be more helpful to have donors on the HRF Review Board, to bring their experience and also balance to the discussions. However, with the exception of some donors like IrishAid, there is a limited donor capacity for engagement with pooled funding mechanisms. One interviewee pointed out that she barely had enough time to administer a few grants to key humanitarian partners. A UN agency interviewee felt that traditional bilateral donors were disengaging, not only from grant administration but also from more political engagement. This is a risk in a highly politicised humanitarian environment like Ethiopia.

The HRF Review Board also discusses CERF allocations but OCHA has been unable to put CERF applications through the same technical review process as HRF applications due to

the very short turnaround time for CERF funding. A Board member felt that this short turnaround time for CERF applications made it difficult to assess where the greatest needs lay and therefore to decide clear criteria for the apportioning of funds.

Recommendations:

- Since country-level pooled funds are often the only source of direct funding for local NGOs, it would be helpful if the HRF started providing direct grants to Ethiopian NGOs (like similar funds in other countries). If it is concerned about the accountability of other local NGOs, the HRF can start with small grants until the organisation has demonstrated its capacity to manage funds. Also, the HRF team already has performance information about the local NGOs that have received funding through INGO partners and could get further information if these organisations are partners of Review Board members.
- Given that the HRF Review Board is already discussing the option of more predictable, strategic funding, it would be helpful for it to assess whether the current 6-month timeframe is appropriate or whether the HRF needs to support a mixture of quick-response, short-term projects and longer-term projects for more chronic needs.
- The timeliness of donor payments clearly has a significant impact on the HRF's ability to respond to needs in a timely way so the Review Board should monitor the timing of donor contributions and work with OCHA/the HC to advocate for improvements, if necessary.
- The HC and HRF team should ensure parity between accountability and reporting standards for NGOs and UN agencies. If an NGO applicant can be refused funding because it has not complied with HRF rules (e.g., on reporting), the same should apply to UN agencies.

4. LEADERSHIP

Leadership is the third pillar of humanitarian reform but is not explicitly addressed by project documents (as demonstrated by the project summary in Annex 1). However, as the CERF Two Year Evaluation notes, *"The strengthening of the Humanitarian Coordinator system is perhaps the key to making all of the other components of humanitarian reform (HR) work effectively. To paraphrase the first CERF review, where the HC system worked well, so did all of the components of HR; where it didn't, they were not as successful"* (page 56).

Leadership proved to be an important issue in Ethiopia, mainly because of concerns about UN leadership on access and upholding humanitarian principles in the Somali region. INGOs regard the UN as too reliant on government to operate in Ethiopia to be effective in raising these concerns. They cited WFP's dependence on the government for food distribution as one example of the fact that UN agencies are unable to withstand government pressure to relinquish control and supervision of aid distributions, particularly in the Somali region. The HC acknowledged the problem and is aware of the INGO perception but feels that he has been as frank with the government about these difficult issues as he can. He argued that greater donor backing would be helpful.

The tension between INGOs and the UN over advocacy on access and humanitarian principles highlights the problem of a dual-hatted Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator. While the RC's priority is to work and maintain a good relationship with the host government, the HC is the champion of the humanitarian community as a whole. As such, s/he can be more challenging about government failures to respect humanitarian space. It may also be very difficult for an RC/HC without solid experience of humanitarian issues to understand the complexities involved and to balance these conflicting demands effectively. The situation in Ethiopia is exacerbated because the government (understandably) regards itself as leading on humanitarian issues.

Although HCs are ultimately responsible for pooled funds like CHF and HRF, in Ethiopia, the HC does not chair or attend Review Board meetings. His involvement is limited to signing project agreements approved by the Review Board. This means that he misses the opportunity to engage in the discussions of the humanitarian situation and appropriate responses that take place during Board meetings. It also means that it is left to OCHA to be the neutral arbiter because almost all the organisations on the Board also receive HRF funding and therefore face conflicts of interest.

Recommendations:

- There is a clear need for INGOs and UN agencies to build bridges around humanitarian concerns. The EHCT may offer a forum for this, if the HC and UN agencies make a concerted effort. Alternatively, the HC could consider having regular meetings with INGOs to hear and address their concerns.
- It would be helpful if the HC increased his engagement with the HRF by participating in Review Board discussions.

5. PARTNERSHIP

UN interviewees stressed the importance of partnership with international NGOs and this is perhaps reflected in the recent establishment of the EHCT. However, as noted in the previous section, one of the key obstacles to UN-INGO partnership is the INGO perception that UN agencies are not sufficiently independent of government to be an effective partner in lobbying on humanitarian issues.

There is limited partnership between international and Ethiopian NGOs in the arena of humanitarian aid (other than through church networks). Of the five INGOs that responded to the questionnaire, three do not work with local NGOs while the other two have five partners each. This may be due to the small number of Ethiopian NGOs involved in providing humanitarian aid as well as concerns that many Ethiopian NGOs have political affiliations.

Since only two of the respondents to the questionnaires have local partners, these provide limited evidence of INGOs building the capacity of Ethiopian NGOs. One consortium member that had worked mainly with government to build capacity commissioned a study on developing a 'partnership package' for local CSOs. However, this is focused on development activities, as the organisation does not work with local NGOs on humanitarian programmes. According to regional ENCU interviewees in Awassa, UN agencies and INGOs have not supported local NGOs to play a stronger role in the Child Survival Task Force. They gave the example of a local NGO that wanted to provide nutrition assistance but lacked funds. It wanted to apply to the HRF through an INGO but none of them were willing to partner with it.

When asked about the kind of partnerships that they would like, local NGOs highlighted relations with the government as their greatest priority. At present, relations between the government and Ethiopian NGOs are characterised by mistrust. The regional ENCU in Awassa claimed that the regional government had not had good experiences with local NGOs because it had found the organisations corrupt and not transparent or accountable. Government interviewees in the Somali region echoed these sentiments. The local NGOs interviewed for this study argued that the government has a tendency to tar all local NGOs with one brush instead of identifying those that deliver assistance effectively. Despite the NGOs' wish for a better relationship with the government, the CSO law is likely to make the situation more difficult.

Many interviewees highlighted the lack of trust across the full range of humanitarian organisations. At the same time, they pointed to trust as an essential ingredient in partnerships. A range of interviewees also made it clear that, despite the serious obstacles to partnerships between humanitarian organisations, these are vital for addressing issues of

humanitarian access and security in the Somali region as well as delivering effective assistance in general.

The passing of the CSO law has cast a shadow over relations between the government and international NGOs. The government restructuring has also made it difficult for both UN agencies and INGOs to identify suitable interlocutors. However, as the government's new disaster management policy and structures become clearer, these could provide opportunities for renewed engagement.

In the case of donor relationships with international NGOs, their perceived lack of support on the CSO law has been an obstacle. British NGOs meet as a group with DfID for informal discussions. However, they believed that discussions are hampered because DfID is under-resourced to address humanitarian issues.

Recommendations:

- A key role for this project will be to build trust, or at least greater cooperation, amongst humanitarian actors, starting with consortium members.
- It would be helpful if international NGOs could explore ways of cooperating with Ethiopian NGOs on humanitarian issues. Consortium members could start by pooling knowledge and experience of their partners and those financed by the HRF and use this to start a dialogue.
- The government's new disaster management policy, with its focus on reducing the vulnerability of communities to natural hazards, offers an opportunity for international organisations to engage with it. INGOs, in particular, are involved in providing both humanitarian and development assistance so such an approach raises the possibility of bringing different aspects of their own programmes closer together.

6. ACCOUNTABILITY TO CRISIS-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

This section is based on visits to three international NGO project sites as well as the five responses to the questionnaire.

The visits to three crisis-affected communities provided very limited examples of humanitarian response. Each of the communities was benefiting from only one humanitarian programme. This may be because two of the sites are in the Somali region where it is difficult for humanitarian actors to operate. However, it does make it difficult to comment on the coordination or quality of humanitarian response, other than to point to its limited nature, compared with the needs expressed by the communities. The researchers undertaking the mapping study agreed to use a simple participatory technique to explore what crisis-affected communities believed they needed to have in place in order to cope effectively and the extent to which they had these in place. The next section describes the findings from these exercises.

6.1 Findings from community consultations

<p>Site 1: This was the site of a community therapeutic care (CTC) programme. Two of the seven mothers interviewed were also receiving assistance under the PSNP.</p>
--

The mothers interviewed highlighted the following key needs and the extent to which they had been met:

- **Water:** This was indicated at a low level because many women have to travel long distances to get water (the supply is only along a main road, far from some villages).
- **Food:** Levels were low due to the failure of the rains. Some families had sold cows and goats to buy agricultural inputs (like fertilizer) and planted crops only to lose them

due to the lack of rain. Only children under five and pregnant and lactating women were receiving any assistance with food.

- Agricultural inputs: This was shown to be low because the community lacked resources to buy more for the next season.
- Alternative sources of income: This would enable them to buy food when their crops failed. The level was at a half-way point because this is only necessary when food supplies are scarce.
- Healthcare: This was shown as below the half-way mark because the CTC programme was based at a health post but this could only cope with very basic health needs so that the INGO operating the CTC brought in its own supplies of basic medicines for the babies and children in the programme.
- School: This was indicated at the half-way mark because the community had access to a school but it was far away and, in the dry season, the heat and lack of water made it difficult to send children to the school.

Site 2: This was a farming community that had been pastoralists but had lost most of its animals. **Assistance received:** An INGO was running a cash-for-work programme, paying villagers to dig a shallow well and a pond to harvest rainwater. Water was a priority because the hand-pump installed by another INGO was no longer working. In 2007, a faith-based organisation had constructed a brick-built school for the village to replace the wood and mud-constructed school that an INGO had helped to build 8 years before.

A group of male community elders (observed by male and female villagers) highlighted the following needs and the extent to which these were covered:

- Food: This was shown to be at a low level because the community had lost its crops in the drought.
- Livestock: This was indicated at a low level because the community still had a few animals, but not enough to sustain it.
- Alternative sources of income: This was shown to be low because the cash-for-work was the only alternative source of income and there had been some misunderstanding about the timing of the payments.
- Water: This was at a high level of fulfilment because of the cash-for-work project that would result in a well and a pond. The community believed that the addition of a borehole would entirely meet its need for water.
- Healthcare: This was a need that was hardly met at all because the community did not have access to a health clinic.
- Removal of the Prosopis tree: According to those interviewed, this tree had been planted by the government and an INGO about 10 years ago to act as a windbreaker. The tree is widespread in the area. It is considered very harmful because it has very deep roots and draws up all available water in its reach. This means that nothing else grows in its vicinity. It is not useful for firewood or animal feed so the community wanted these trees removed, perhaps through a cash-for-work project.

Site 3: This was a pastoralist community where an INGO had placed a trained animal health worker as part of a livelihoods programme. A few years ago, the same INGO had installed two hand-pumps. Of these, one was providing a small amount of water (11 jerry cans a day) while the other was out of use because it had been contaminated during a flood.

The male village elders (observed by male and female villagers) highlighted the following four key needs and the extent to which they were being addressed. They only raised a limited number of needs because they had such low expectations of any of them being met. After this exercise, the villagers showed that many of the huts had been abandoned because

families had left in search of work, with some migrating to Djibouti where they had clan members and others moving to an area with a food-for-work programme.

- **Food:** As with the other communities interviewed, food was the key need highlighted. This was shown at a low level because, according to the interviewees, a neighbouring village was receiving food aid but they were not, even though they had received food during the previous drought three years before. A faith-based NGO had provided the neighbouring village with water pumps for irrigation and the respondents believed that this organisation had helped the village get access to food aid as well.
- **Water:** As already noted, the villagers had little access to water and had lost most of their animals as a result, so this was also indicated at a low level. A nearby river had dried to a trickle except for one part where there was a ravine in the riverbed, but the villagers explained that they could not access this water without a pump.
- **Healthcare:** This was at a very low level as well because the community did not have access to health services. A Regional Health Bureau-operated mobile clinic serves a neighbouring area but not the village visited. This is because the RHB has 20 mobile health teams for the 52 districts of the region. It assigns the teams according to the severity of need in woredas identified as 'hot spots' due to the drought. As the situation changes, the teams are moved from one district to another.
- **Education:** This was marked at the half-way point because the village has a small school provided by the district administration but no teachers qualified to teach beyond grade 2. As a result, children leave school and engage in pastoralist activities after grade 2.

6.2 Findings from interviews and questionnaires

Despite the limited examples of humanitarian response, interviewees involved in coordination mechanisms (such as MANTF and the Child Survival Task Force) emphasised that these bodies had an important gap-filling role. They also pointed to the HRF as a useful mechanism for financing gap-filling activities. The ENCU in particular cited cases when it had approached OCHA jointly with an INGO about the possibility of funding much-needed nutrition programmes.

The communities interviewed for this study did not have examples of being consulted by the INGOs that were assisting them. At site 2, there had been some confusion about the timing of payments for work completed and the community felt that, even though they had signed an agreement, the INGO had changed this. Community leaders had raised the problem of payment with the INGO concerned but not had a response.

INGO staff members said that they did have mechanisms in place to consult beneficiaries, particularly about needs. This is supported by responses to the questionnaire. Four of the five respondents stated that they involve beneficiaries in needs assessments and implementation. Three of them said that beneficiaries are involved in monitoring and evaluation. However, a few interviewees also admitted that short donor timeframes for the submission of proposals meant that they had little time to consult crisis-affected communities before writing proposals. One interviewee argued that INGOs tend to consult local administrators rather than crisis-affected communities at the project design phase.

Despite these statements by INGO staff, government interviewees maintained that INGO projects were donor-driven. They argued that they often have little knowledge of a project until the INGO comes to obtain sign-off on it. One regional government interviewee felt that regional line ministry staff members are too willing to sign project agreements without reading them and then have no further knowledge of the projects because INGOs do not submit reports or communicate what they have done. He believed that INGO projects also lacked the flexibility to respond to changing needs because they were based on donor priorities instead of community realities.

Recommendations:

- Once appointed, the Humanitarian Reform Officer should undertake more comprehensive visits to crisis-affected communities to assess the extent of humanitarian response and whether accountability mechanisms are effective.
- Consortium members could explore opportunities to cooperate on involving crisis-affected communities in needs assessments to ensure that communities are not subjected to multiple surveys and assessments.
- The project offers consortium members an opportunity to share best practice on involving beneficiaries in project implementation and monitoring activities.

7. EFFECT OF REFORMS ON HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

As with accountability to beneficiaries, the limited humanitarian response in the sites visited makes it difficult to say definitively whether reform mechanisms have improved the timeliness, predictability and effectiveness of humanitarian response. The problem is compounded by the fact that one of the main weaknesses of the humanitarian system is the lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation and a transparent sharing of project implementation information. This means that there is a lack of evidence linking the work of clusters and funding through the CERF and the HRF to humanitarian programmes.

Despite having very few staff members, the HRF team tries to undertake at least one monitoring visit to the NGO projects that it funds. One INGO interviewee felt that HRF monitoring staff tend not to appreciate the challenges of project implementation in the Ethiopian context and to accept ‘unconfirmed opinions’ as facts about the programme because they lack technical expertise. However, the HRF team’s efforts to monitor NGO projects do provide independent information on project implementation and, possibly, an incentive for timely implementation. The Review Board is assessing how to put in place more consistent evaluation procedures to complement monitoring data.

There are no independent monitoring and evaluation procedures for CERF grants at present. This, and the fact that the HRF team does not monitor UN agency projects, is because UN agencies have argued consistently that they have their own measures in place to ensure project and programme quality. The CERF Two Year Evaluation agreed with this position but argued that the *‘variability in quality suggests that those accountable for CERF funds need a minimum guarantee of quality from the agencies and that the current monitoring and reporting regime does not provide this’* (page 68).

The lack of evidence about whether the reforms have made any difference to humanitarian response by international organisations points to the need for a systematic approach to assessing how the different pillars of the reform fit together and tracking what influence they have had on response.

Recommendations:

- It would be helpful if HRF monitoring were extended to all projects, NGO and UN.
- It would also be useful if the HC, as the person responsible for ensuring a timely, coordinated response, commissioned a country-level evaluation on how the different elements of the reform process are working together.

8. SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

Since each of the previous sections has highlighted specific recommendations, this section provides a brief summary of the conclusions (including cross-cutting issues) and recommendations from the study.

With the exception of conflict in the Somali region, the nature of humanitarian crises in Ethiopia suggests the need for concerted disaster risk reduction and disaster mitigation. One interviewee gave the example of an HRF-funded joint UN-NGO response to a flood-affected community in Amhara in summer 2007. This was the third year that the community had been hit by flooding so the UN agency had mounted a response in 2006 as well. It used the same budget for the 2007 response but was able to save on costs by using better procurement procedures. The implementing agencies consulted the affected community about how to utilise the leftover funds. The community pointed out that the flooding was occurring because the riverbed had silted up so it requested that the money be used to dig out the silt and shore up the riverbanks. The implementing agencies did this and, in 2008, the river did not flood.

This example highlights the importance of much closer links between humanitarian and development activities, not just for coordination amongst humanitarian actors. As noted earlier, the government's new disaster management policy offers aid agencies a real opportunity to engage with the government on ensuring that humanitarian aid is not being used to address the failures of development assistance in reducing the vulnerability of communities to natural hazards.

However, coordination within the humanitarian community requires clarification and improvement first. There is still some confusion about how the cluster approach adds value to the Task Force mechanism and a sense of meeting fatigue amongst international actors. There is also dissatisfaction about the quality of most coordination meetings, though meeting convenors can improve them substantially by following some basic best-practice. The implementation of the cluster approach has not been helped by the fact that UNICEF is the only cluster lead agency that has invested substantially in its leadership role.

Although INGOs are participating in the various coordination mechanisms, they lack the time to engage strategically because staff members are already swamped by their programme responsibilities. There is some evidence that, with the introduction of new funding mechanisms under humanitarian reform, INGOs are finding it increasingly difficult to cover overhead expenses¹⁶. This puts even more pressure on already-stretched organisations. The appointment of a Humanitarian Response Officer will provide much-needed support to consortium members and, potentially, to a wider group of NGOs. But there is also a clear need for a wider debate on resourcing the effective engagement of NGOs in reform-related processes.

One obstacle to the open sharing of information in meetings and effective coordination as well as partnership is the lack of trust amongst humanitarian actors. This is not easy to address but the NGOs and Humanitarian Project does offer an opportunity for improving cooperation amongst consortium members at least. However, it will be far more challenging to put into practice the project's stated goal of ensuring the greater engagement of Ethiopian NGOs in coordination and funding mechanisms. This is due to the limited involvement of Ethiopian NGOs in providing humanitarian aid and the implications of the CSO law as well as INGO concerns about their lack of capacity and political affiliations.

It will also be problematic to address issues of partnership between UN agencies and INGOs because of the INGO perception that the UN has failed to take the lead on gaining humanitarian access in the Somali region or standing up for humanitarian principles due to its close relationship with the government. This highlights the challenges of a combined Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator role.

¹⁶ See two GHD commissioned studies for further details: A. Stoddard (2008) *International Humanitarian Financing: Review and comparative assessment of instruments* and Development Initiatives (2008) *Indirect Support Cost Study*.

The study was not able to find substantial evidence on accountability to beneficiaries or the effects of the introduction of reform mechanisms on humanitarian response. This is because of limited examples of humanitarian assistance in the sites visited during the study. However, interviewees clearly found the Humanitarian Response Fund to be a quick and responsive mechanism that has facilitated both gap-filling activities as well as timely response to sudden onset crises. It will be helpful if the HRO can focus on monitoring whether the reform process improves accountability to beneficiaries as well as the nature of humanitarian response.

ANNEX 1: NGOS AND HUMANITARIAN REFORM PROJECT



Save the Children



NGOs and Humanitarian Reform: An Opportunity to Influence the Future of Humanitarian Reform

Background

Since the beginning of the UN-led humanitarian reform process¹, there has been growing awareness of the need to better involve NGOs – particularly national and local NGOs – in the various aspects of reform. The external evaluation of the cluster approach noted that the lack of involvement of national and community-based organisations was one of “the most disappointing findings” and that while “Partnerships have improved marginally...no significant gains were seen for local NGO participants.” The ultimate aim of improving NGO engagement in the reform process is to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian response so that populations in need can be better protected and assisted.

Improving NGO Engagement and Downward Accountability

National and local NGOs are mainly absent from many of the reform forums such as the clusters, the pooled fund boards and the humanitarian partnership country teams and even international NGOs often find it difficult to consistently engage in the various processes. National and local NGOs are mostly unable to access UN pooled funds and NGOs are excluded from direct access to the CERF.

A three-year project started in September 2008 (funded by DfID) to increase the effective engagement of international, national, and local NGOs in humanitarian reform (clusters, humanitarian financing, and Humanitarian Coordinator strengthening). The project places a particular emphasis on catalyzing NGO engagement in humanitarian reform processes.

Project Focus

The project will focus around the main themes requiring further work in the current UN-led reforms:

1. partnerships between humanitarian actors;
2. downwards accountability to beneficiaries;
3. programme impact on populations receiving humanitarian aid; and
4. at the global level, international policies related to reform and partnership.

The focus will be on clusters; innovation and lesson-learning related to NGO engagement in humanitarian coordination and financing mechanisms; and promoting effective means to represent the views of crisis-affected populations through evidence-based advocacy, a focus on downwards accountability, and improving the impact of humanitarian action. The consortium members will facilitate a global outreach.

Partnership Approach

Building upon existing initiatives like the Global Humanitarian Platform’s *Principles of Partnership*, and working as closely as possible with donors, UN agencies, and partners, the project aims to connect country level experience to international policy and learning. To meet the overall objective of the project to improve the efficiency and reach of humanitarian response for beneficiary populations, the project will produce practical guidance for NGOs working in humanitarian situations. There will be an explicit focus on two-way capacity-building and inclusion of national and local civil society. Regional workshops will take place later in the project to learn lessons and, throughout the project, emphasis will be placed on the importance of partnership.

Country Focus

The current state of coordination and response will be mapped to create a baseline against which progress can be measured over the three years in four focus countries:

1. Afghanistan,
2. Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC),
3. Ethiopia, and
4. Zimbabwe.

Sudan will be the fifth focus country.

NGOs in at least five other countries – Haiti, Indonesia, Palestine, Mozambique, and Lesotho – will provide supporting evidence by regularly sharing information about clusters, response, and partnership, which will help to map the bigger picture beyond the focus countries.

Activities

Humanitarian Reform Officers (HROs) will be engaged in 2009 to provide liaison in each of the four (to five) focus countries to carry out the activities related to the project. An International Project Manager will oversee the project, providing support to the HROs in each country and working to disseminate information and share lessons.

The activities will include, *inter alia*, the following:

- ◆ a mapping study in each focus country, looking at trends and dynamics of humanitarian response;
- ◆ promotion of shared needs assessment frameworks;
- ◆ development of practical guidance and best practice;
- ◆ beneficiary workshops to be held in each focus country;
- ◆ supporting and building capacity of national NGOs for humanitarian response; and
- ◆ international advocacy to UN and donors based on elaborated policy recommendations.

The Consortium

The project is being run by a consortium of seven NGOs: ActionAid (as lead agency), CARE International UK, CAFOD, International Rescue Committee, ICVA, Oxfam, and Save the Children UK.

For more information visit: www.ActionAid.org or write to yasmin.mcDonnell@actionaid.org

December 2008
