Synthesis Report

Review of the engagement of NGOs with the humanitarian reform process

Based on five country studies

Afghanistan
Democratic Republic of Congo
Ethiopia
Sudan
Zimbabwe

Commissioned by the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project

Contents

		Page
1	Executive summary	1
1.1	Background to the UN-led humanitarian reform	2
1.2	Interlinked elements of humanitarian reform	2
1.3	Patchy progress	3
1.4	Moving forward	4
	Recommendations	6
2	Introduction	8
2.1	The genesis of humanitarian reform	9
2.2	The interlinked reform elements	10
2.3	A late, but welcome addition: partnership	10
2.4	Variable progress	12
2.5	The mapping studies' findings	13
3	Leadership	14
3.1	A key spoke in the wheel of humanitarian reform	14
3.2	Comparing the Humanitarian Coordinator and Resident Coordinator functions	14
3.2.1	Impartiality and responsiveness to NGO concerns	16
3.3	Where it works	17
3.4	The new system: plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose	18
3.5	Measuring HC performance	20
3.6	Leadership's impact on the other elements of reform	21
4	Coordination	22
4.1	Introduction	22
4.2	The introduction of the cluster approach	22
4.3	Clusters or sectors?	23
4.4	Has the cluster approach been implemented?	24
4.5	What makes an effective cluster?	25
4.6	Cluster co-leads	26
4.7	NGO participation in country-level clusters	26
4.8	Inter-cluster coordination	28
4.9	Humanitarian Country Teams and similar structures	28
5	Accountability	30
5.1	Accountability to crisis-affected communities	30
5.2	Putting crisis-affected people at the centre	30
5.3	NGO led-initiatives to strengthen accountability	31
5.4	Overall performance benchmarks to enhance accountability and learning	32
5.5	Role of clusters in implementing and promoting accountability to communities	33
5.6	Funding	34
5.7	The role of leadership in improving accountability	34
5.8	Ways forward	35
6	Financing	36
6.1	Introduction	36
6.2	Funding in the mapping countries	37
6.3	CERF	39
6.4	Using pooled funds strategically	40
6.5	Country-based pooled fund advisory boards	41
6.6	Allocations from pooled funds	41
6.7	Implications of humanitarian reform for bilateral funding	44
6.8	Ways forward	45
7	Conclusion	46
	Acronyms	48

Cover photo by Kate Holt/Shoot The Earth/ActionAid
Woman and her family return home after fleeing fighting in Eastern Congo
November 2008

Part 1
Executive summary

This report analyses the current state of global humanitarian reform efforts from an NGO perspective by synthesising a series of mapping studies carried out between November 2008 and February 2009 that looked at humanitarian reform in five different countries: Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Sudan and Zimbabwe. Lessons from other contexts are also brought in to strengthen the analysis and provide an overview of humanitarian reform.

Many of the findings of the mapping studies are not new to those who have been following the UN-led humanitarian reform. They do, however, provide field-based evidence to support previously expressed views and emphasise the areas where improvements must be made. This report is intended both to provide a constructive, evidence-based critique of the state of reform and to set out clear recommendations and ways forward in finding solutions to the weaknesses and challenges inherent in the humanitarian community. Many of these challenges existed well before the reforms, and they still confront us today.

The research was commissioned by a consortium formed by six NGOs – ActionAid, CAFOD, CARE, International Rescue Committee, Oxfam and Save the Children – together with the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) as part of the three-year NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project, funded by DfID. The project aims to strengthen local, national and international humanitarian NGO voices in influencing policy debates and field processes related to the humanitarian reform and to propose solutions so that humanitarian response can better meet the needs of affected populations. This report represents a baseline for the project. Future papers will report on progress.

1.1
Background to the UN-led humanitarian reform

The impetus behind current global reform efforts can be traced to the poor performance of the international community's response to the humanitarian crisis in Darfur, Sudan in 2004. The then Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), Jan Egeland, commissioned the Humanitarian Response Review, which made 36 concrete recommendations for improving humanitarian response. Some of these recommendations formed the bedrock of the UN's humanitarian reform initiative, rolled out in 2005, which was originally conceived as having three 'pillars':

— Improved humanitarian leadership (through Humanitarian Coordinators);
— Better coordination of humanitarian action (through the cluster approach); and
— Faster, more predictable and equitable humanitarian funding.

A fourth element – more effective partnerships among humanitarian actors – was belatedly added following the adoption of the Principles of Partnership by the Global Humanitarian Platform in July 2007. The limited focus of the reform also ignored accountability to affected populations, which remains underrepresented in the UN-led reform discussions. Another major flaw in the reform's inception was that it focused on the role of international humanitarian actors and ignored that of national and local actors.

The NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project and the initial mapping studies have focused on UN-led reform initiatives to a significant extent. However, the Project and this report also seek to present a more holistic picture of humanitarian action and how it needs to change by drawing on wider experiences, including lessons learnt from previous reform initiatives by bilateral donors and the NGO sector itself.

1.2
Interlinked elements of humanitarian reform

The mapping studies emphasised the interlinked nature of the different elements of humanitarian reform, and found that the individual elements of reform work best when all elements are working in concert. For example, the studies found that when one element – such as leadership – is weak, the other elements of reform face negative consequences and humanitarian response suffers. Conversely, strong leadership can ensure effective clusters that address humanitarian needs and can ensure that pooled funds are used strategically according to priority of need.

1.3
Patchy progress

"While the mapping studies found that there has been progress in some... areas of humanitarian reform, that progress has been patchy"

While the mapping studies found that there has been progress in some of the above areas of humanitarian reform, that progress has been patchy.

Financing

Financing is the element of the humanitarian reform that has seen the greatest progress with the creation of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), although this element was probably the one that has demanded the least amount of effort by the UN compared with the other elements. At the same time, however, there remain challenges to get CERF funding to NGOs, which carry out the bulk of humanitarian work, in a timely manner. There are also challenges with the other "reformed" humanitarian financing elements: Common Humanitarian Funds (CHFs), Emergency Response Funds (ERFs) and Humanitarian Response Funds (HRFs). One of the biggest concerns is the lack of transparency concerning the destination of these funds and whether they are allocated on the basis of need alone or on the basis of other considerations.

Leadership

"In four out of the five study countries, strong and experienced humanitarian leadership has been lacking"

The research particularly found gaps in humanitarian leadership. In four out of the five study countries, strong and experienced humanitarian leadership has been lacking. The UN has continued to appoint unqualified Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) who do not adequately understand humanitarian action; who underestimate the importance of NGOs; who do not understand the critical importance of partnership; and who do not understand how even small amounts of funding can have a strategic impact in humanitarian response. The country studies illustrate the conflict between the Resident Coordinator (RC) and HC roles very clearly: interviewees gave instances of where they felt humanitarian issues were sidelined because they were subsumed by RC considerations. There is a need to ensure that stronger, more effective leaders with humanitarian experience are appointed to the pivotal HC position, as well as to lead clusters, particularly at the country level. Without such effective leadership, other elements of the reform process – such as coordination, funding and partnership – are adversely affected.

Accountability and partnership

As a matter of priority, clusters need to devote much more time and attention to finding ways to ensure accountability to affected populations, as well as ensuring that all cluster participants are treated as genuine partners. The mapping studies found that involvement of NGOs in reform processes has been inconsistent. In many cases, both international and national/local NGOs are only vaguely aware of the workings of humanitarian reform. In some global clusters, several NGOs' efforts to engage at their inception were rebuffed or given a frosty reception from the UN agencies involved. While this situation has now improved, it has taken time for some NGOs to regain an appetite for engagement.

Where NGOs do engage with clusters, they often feel overwhelmed by meetings, they do not feel respected as equal partners and they do not see reform grounded in accountability to crisis-affected communities. While many NGOs will engage in clusters at the global level, they are finding that in several country situations, their staff continue to be frustrated by the inefficiency and inequality demonstrated in many clusters. Some NGOs see the value in co-leading/co-facilitating/co-chairing clusters, but what that role entails requires clarification. What is more, the added responsibility of co-leadership brings with it the need for resources to fulfil that role, which will require donor support.

Involving local and national NGOs

As noted above, the original focus of the reform on the international community was to the detriment of national and local actors. In conflict situations, the involvement of governments represents an additional set of challenges for humanitarian actors, who seek to respond to need wherever it occurs on an impartial basis. The UN-led reform efforts, with their technical and procedural focus, have so far failed to deal with these kinds of challenges in a convincing fashion. Local and national NGOs continue to have difficulties in accessing funds or meaningfully participating in coordination mechanisms.

HCs and cluster leads have a role to play in supporting local and national NGOs, but their participation must also be facilitated by their international NGO partners. Donors should also play a pivotal role in finding ways to better support the role of local and national NGOs in the reform processes, whether in clusters or in terms of accessing pooled funds. There are still questions about what role (if any) clusters should play in allocating funding. While such funding responsibilities may work well in some clusters, in other circumstances there is a perception that priority is given to the cluster lead agency's projects. There is also concern that cluster lead agencies source funds with the aim of sub-contracting to NGOs who have already put forward projects for funding, unnecessarily increasing the administrative costs.

1.4 Moving forward

"The mapping studies found no hard evidence that UN-centred humanitarian reforms have improved the provision of humanitarian response thus far"

A striking feature of the mapping studies is that they found no hard evidence that UN-centred humanitarian reforms have improved the provision of humanitarian response thus far. The failure to establish benchmarks for overall system performance, as recommended in the original Humanitarian Response Review, as well as the failure to integrate accountability into the reform process, does make it hard to gauge the true impact of the reforms on affected populations. Nevertheless, the fact that the reform is designed to address acknowledged failings in humanitarian response suggests that it has the potential to make a marked difference. It is to be hoped that the second phase of the cluster evaluation will provide specific evidence of this impact.

NGOs are the largest group of actors involved in humanitarian response. Their engagement with the reform process is crucial if their own concerns about humanitarian leadership, the speed and transparency of humanitarian financing, accountability and other issues are to be addressed by the system. NGO

"The ultimate test for humanitarian reform will be the extent to which it improves the lot of crisis-affected people, rather than whether it streamlines the international humanitarian system"

engagement, where appropriate, should result in a less technocratic debate on reform, leading to a greater focus on principles and values. From an NGO perspective, reform efforts must be assessed according to their implications for humanitarian principles (such as independence and impartiality in conflict situations) and values (such as the commitment to increasing accountability to crisis-affected populations). At the same time, in situations of conflict or where the national government is a party to the conflict or is violating the rights of segments of their own populations, NGO independence must be respected. A context-based balance of cooperation, based on the established Principles of Partnership, must be struck.

The mapping studies provide a picture of the situation in each country, which will allow further analyses in the future that may (or may not) indicate progress with the various reform mechanisms over the coming years. Whilst we recognise that some of the recommendations made in this report may swim against the prevailing tide, we believe their implementation would result in better outcomes for crisis-affected populations. The challenge for the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project over the next two years is to advocate for the full implementation of humanitarian reform to deliver better outcomes to crisis-affected populations. If it can be demonstrated that the reforms contribute to improving response, then an increase in the effective involvement of NGOs in humanitarian reform will follow. The Project will look for ways to improve the different elements of the humanitarian reform process. However, if the work of the Project over the coming years finds that certain elements cannot be fixed as the reform is currently configured, we will be bold in making recommendations for change.

Finally, it is incumbent on all humanitarian actors to re-focus on impact – are we saving more lives, preventing suffering and maintaining human dignity among those affected by natural or human-made disasters? The ultimate test for humanitarian reform will be the extent to which it improves the lot of crisis-affected people, rather than whether it streamlines the international humanitarian system.

Recommendations

Leadership

1 The ERC should apply IASC standards for the appointment of HCs and only appoint people with substantial humanitarian experience and should ensure that monitoring mechanisms in the HC Compacts for assessing the performance and quality of Humanitarian Coordinators' leadership are effectively applied.

2 UN agencies in the IASC should abandon the double-hatted RC/HC model as the norm and separate the roles to allow for strong humanitarian leadership.

3 The ERC, UN agencies, global cluster leads and donors should ensure clusters have dedicated cluster leadership; accountability of the cluster lead to the HC; and a collaborative approach following the Principles of Partnership.

Coordination

4 The role of co-leads or co-chairs of clusters at the field level needs to be clarified and donors should ensure financial support for NGO cluster co-leads or co-chairs.

5 By the end of 2010, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, together with Humanitarian Coordinators and the IASC must ensure that Humanitarian Country Teams are formed and involve NGOs in a meaningful way, in line with the Principles of Partnership.

6 International NGOs and UN agencies should identify ways to better involve their national partners in humanitarian coordination and reform mechanisms to promote more effective humanitarian responses.

7 Donors should increase their engagement with the humanitarian reform process at the country level to provide more consistent support.

8 Through their position on UN agencies' executive boards, donors should hold UN agencies to account for applying the Principles of Partnership as endorsed by the Global Humanitarian Platform in 2007, as a means of improving the effectiveness of coordination mechanisms and the participation of local, national and international NGOs.

Accountability

9 HCs, HCTs, clusters and donors should ensure that funding procedures enable aid agencies to consult with, and respond to, feedback from crisis-affected communities, as well as ensuring projects reflect their priorities.

10 International NGOs and the main accountability initiatives should work closely with UN actors to improve accountability and transparency to crisis-affected populations within humanitarian reform mechanisms, and advocate for the replication of good models.

Funding

11 Donors should ensure flexibility and diversity in funding mechanisms, especially pooled funds, so as to facilitate access by NGOs – particularly local and national NGOs.

12 Like UN agencies, international NGOs should be transparent about documenting onward funding to national or local NGOs and should provide adequate overhead costs.

13 By the end of 2010, UN agencies receiving bi-lateral funds or donor funding via the CERF and pooled funds should be required by donors to provide evidence of the speed and transparency with which funding is passed through to NGOs.

14 UN agencies should standardise their procedures for funding NGOs to reduce transaction costs so as to increase the access of national NGOs to these funds and to avoid the negotiation of overhead costs on a case-by-case basis.

15 Direct bilateral donor funding to NGOs should also be reformed to promote adequacy, responsiveness and timeliness. In particular, flexible and predictable funding should be provided to build NGO humanitarian capacity over the longer-term and enable speedy response in fast-breaking emergencies – neither of which are comparative advantages of the UN pooled funds.

Part 2
Introduction

"This report analyses the current state of the humanitarian reform from an NGO perspective and examines NGO engagement with the reform in five countries"

2
Introduction

In 2008, six international NGOs and one NGO consortium[1] came together to set up the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project, which runs until October 2011.[2] With widespread perceptions that the UN-led humanitarian reform (initiated in 2005) is UN-centric, internationally rather than nationally-focused, and that UN agencies have benefited most from funding through the CERF and pooled funding mechanisms, there was a need to address the root causes of the limited NGO engagement. The project aims to increase the effective engagement of international, national and local NGOs in the four elements of humanitarian reform: the clusters, reformed humanitarian financing, strengthened humanitarian leadership and partnership. It will provide NGO perspectives on what works and what does not work, and will also propose solutions so that humanitarian response can better meet the needs of affected populations.

Independent consultants[3] undertook mapping studies between November 2008 and February 2009 in five countries: Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Sudan and Zimbabwe. The findings from the country mapping studies represent a baseline. In Afghanistan, DRC, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe, Humanitarian Reform Officers (HROs) have been employed by the project to work on country level initiatives and to develop solutions to some of the challenges identified. In conjunction with the International Project Manager, these HROs and the consortium members will feed findings and recommendations into global debates on humanitarian reform.

This report synthesises the findings of those five mapping studies and draws on NGO and others' experiences during the implementation of the UN-led humanitarian reform in other countries, as well as on various studies on the reform. It analyses the current state of the humanitarian reform from an NGO perspective and examines NGO engagement with the reform in the five countries.

Many of the weaknesses and challenges inherent in the humanitarian community today predate the current reform process. Likewise, many of the findings from the mapping studies are not new. However, they do provide clear field-based evidence to support previously expressed views. Therefore, this report provides a constructive, evidence-based critique of the state of reform, as well as clear recommendations and ways forward in finding solutions.

1 Consortium members are ActionAid, CAFOD, CARE, International Rescue Committee, Oxfam, Save the Children and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA).

2 The project is funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DfID).

3 Afghanistan, Antonio Donini; DRC and Ethiopia, Tasneem Mowjee; Sudan, John Cosgrave; Zimbabwe, Ralf Otto: available at www.icva.ch/ngosandhumanitarianreform.html

2.1
The genesis of humanitarian reform

In early 2004, frustrated by the inadequacy of the international response to the humanitarian crisis in Darfur, Sudan, Jan Egeland (the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator at the time) commissioned the Humanitarian Response Review. The objective of this review was to develop "a joint plan of action to improve the effectiveness and timeliness of the humanitarian response to emergencies". The Humanitarian Response Review[4] (published in 2005) made 36 recommendations for reform at the international level, some of which were incorporated into the UN-led humanitarian reform's three original 'pillars':

— Clusters (to improve humanitarian coordination and make it more predictable and accountable);
— The Central Emergency Response Fund (for more predictable and timely funding); and
— Strengthening Humanitarian Coordinators (to improve humanitarian leadership).

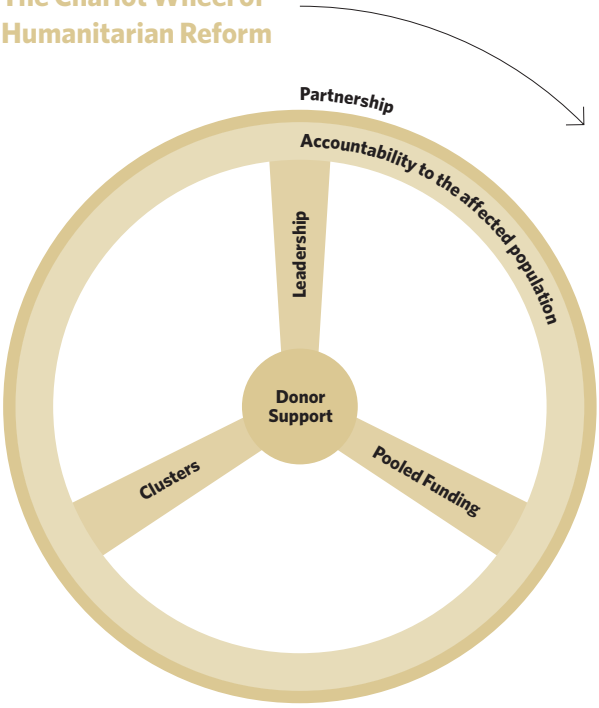
Today, the cluster pillar is often referred to by the more general term 'Coordination', while the UN also calls the HC pillar of reform 'Strengthening humanitarian coordination'. The CERF pillar has since been expanded to include pooled funding mechanisms, such as Emergency Response Funds (ERFs) and Common Humanitarian Funds (CHFs).

Recommendations for benchmarking the performance of the international humanitarian system and measuring the impact of humanitarian response for each proposed area of reform was a strong thread running through the Humanitarian Response Review. However these, and many of the other 36 recommendations, were never incorporated into the humanitarian reform.

4 Adinolfi, C., 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, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). New York: United Nations. URL: www.icva.ch/doc00001434.pdf

Figure 1

The Chariot Wheel of Humanitarian Reform



John Cosgrave 2009

2.2
The interlinked reform elements

"The different elements of humanitarian reform can only work effectively when they are all in place and successfully applied"

When the reforms were originally conceived, they were intended to be mutually supporting. The research carried out in the five mapping studies has highlighted one key aspect of the whole humanitarian reform process: the different elements of humanitarian reform can only work effectively (and presumably, therefore, to the benefit of crisis-affected populations) when they are all in place and successfully applied.

This interrelationship between the different aspects of the humanitarian reform suggests that they are best visualised not as the pillars of a classical building, but rather as spokes of a chariot-wheel (see Figure 1) – a dynamic analogy used throughout this report. The three spokes of the reform are funding, coordination (clusters) and leadership, resting on the hub of donor support. The mapping studies found that for the reform to actually work towards providing more effective humanitarian responses, other 'missing' parts, such as greater accountability to crisis-affected communities must be included. The whole reform can only be held together through the steel band of partnership running around the wheel.

2.3
A late, but welcome addition: partnership

Partnership was absent from the original humanitarian reform, and the word itself does not even appear in the main text of the Humanitarian Response Review. Perhaps even more problematic was the fact that the role of local

"No single humanitarian agency can respond to all humanitarian needs on its own"

and national humanitarian actors was left outside the process of the original reform. The nature of the humanitarian system makes partnership critical to effective action. The humanitarian system is not a hierarchical one, but a melange of agencies, all with different mandates, missions and agendas. No single humanitarian agency can respond to all humanitarian needs on its own. The primary objective of building humanitarian partnerships should be to make humanitarian action more effective and efficient, and to enhance its positive impact for affected populations. Partnership is not, and should not, be seen as an end in itself.

In reaction to the reform's absence of focus on local and national humanitarian response and the UN-centric nature of the reform, a meeting was eventually held with leaders of 40 humanitarian organisations (including UN agencies, NGOs, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and the World Bank) in July 2006 to identify ways to achieve more effective humanitarian outcomes. They set up the Global Humanitarian Platform (GHP)[5] , based on the understanding that no single organisation can meet all humanitarian needs and therefore, more genuine partnerships among humanitarian actors were needed in order to provide better humanitarian aid. The GHP adopted the Principles of Partnership in 2007 – equality, transparency, result-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity (see Figure 2). These Principles of Partnership recognise both the diversity and interdependence of humanitarian actors. They form the basis for collaboration and coordination, providing the steel rim of the chariot wheel of humanitarian actors working together "to enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian action."

"Partnership between national and local NGOs and international humanitarian actors is an area where considerable work remains to be done"

While the Principles of Partnership are meant to apply across the humanitarian community, the mapping studies have highlighted that partnership between national and local NGOs and international humanitarian actors is an area where considerable work remains to be done.

Since the establishment of the GHP, partnership has become part of the humanitarian reform nomenclature. It is often called the 'fourth pillar' of reform, and has also been (inaccurately) described as the foundation of reform. Clusters are also now supposed to function in accordance with the Principles of Partnership.

Partnership is critical if clusters are to be led in the consensual way intended. Partnership is also important to pooled funding arrangements, which should be geared towards ensuring the best quality response, with access to funds determined by each organisation's capabilities and not just its name. Yet beyond all these considerations, partnership will only improve the impact of humanitarian response for crisis-affected populations if there is a shared commitment to improve delivery and performance on the part of all humanitarian actors.

5 See www.globalhumanitarianplatform.org

Figure 2

Principles of Partnership

A Statement of Commitment

Endorsed by the Global Humanitarian Platform, 12 July 2007

The Global Humanitarian Platform, created in July 2006, brings together UN and non-UN humanitarian organisations on an equal footing.

Striving to enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian action, based on an ethical obligation and accountability to the populations we serve,

Acknowledging diversity as an asset of the humanitarian community and recognising the interdependence among humanitarian organisations,

Committed to building and nurturing an effective partnership,

... the organisations participating in the Global Humanitarian Platform agree to base their partnership on the following principles:

Equality	Equality requires mutual respect between members of the partnership irrespective of size and power. The participants must respect each other's mandates, obligations and independence and recognise each other's constraints and commitments. Mutual respect must not preclude organisations from engaging in constructive dissent.
Transparency	Transparency is achieved through dialogue (on equal footing), with an emphasis on early consultations and early sharing of information. Communications and transparency, including financial transparency, increase the level of trust among organisations.
Result-oriented approach	Effective humanitarian action must be reality-based and action-oriented. This requires result-oriented coordination based on effective capabilities and concrete operational capacities.
Responsibility	Humanitarian organisations have an ethical obligation to each other to accomplish their tasks responsibly, with integrity and in a relevant and appropriate way. They must make sure they commit to activities only when they have the means, competencies, skills, and capacity to deliver on their commitments. Decisive and robust prevention of abuses committed by humanitarians must also be a constant effort.
Complementarity	The diversity of the humanitarian community is an asset if we build on our comparative advantages and complement each other's contributions. Local capacity is one of the main assets to enhance and on which to build. Whenever possible, humanitarian organisations should strive to make it an integral part in emergency response. Language and cultural barriers must be overcome.

www.globalhumanitarianplatform.org

2.4
Variable progress

"Progress has been patchy and some vital elements of the 'wheel' are often lacking"

The mapping studies found that there has been progress on some parts of the humanitarian reform, but this progress has been patchy and some vital elements of the 'wheel' are often lacking. The leadership spoke was effectively missing in four out of five of the study countries and the cluster spoke was implemented in a haphazard and ad hoc fashion. Funding generally worked in favour of UN agencies. Partnership continued to be variable – working well in some instances and not at all in others.

One of the constraints on an ideal response is the variable quantity and quality of needs assessments. Without good needs assessment, there is a risk that tight coordination just helps to keep the response internally coherent, but a poor match for needs. This risk of an off-target response is a feature of the reforms, as currently implemented. They seem to be focused on the reliability (predictability) of the humanitarian response rather than on its accuracy.There is no hard evidence from the mapping studies that the humanitarian reform can improve the provision of humanitarian aid to affected

populations. Nevertheless, the fact that the reform is trying to address some of the well-known failings in humanitarian response suggests that it has the potential to do so. However, partial implementation of the reform brings increased costs without delivering the full potential benefit, and increases the risk that the costs of the reform processes may outweigh the benefits.[6]

One of the major flaws in the way the humanitarian reform was originally conceived and rolled out was that it focused only on international systems of humanitarian response. There was not sufficient exploration at the reform's introduction of the possible implications of proposed changes at the national and local levels, for example, in terms of relations with government, where appropriate, and the role of local civil society and local and national NGOs. As this report will show, all humanitarian actors continue to grapple with the legacy of this oversight today.

2.5
The mapping studies' findings

This synthesis report cannot cover all the richness of the mapping studies, but instead aims to highlight the main trends and findings and to draw out specific recommendations. While some of the recommendations will not be new ones, they are viewed as essential if the reform is to function efficiently for the benefit of affected populations. Other recommendations come from a particularly NGO perspective and, as a result, will hopefully contribute to making aspects of the reform more relevant and useful to NGOs as important humanitarian actors.

The report starts by looking at the weakest link in the humanitarian reform process: leadership. Without strong leadership, all aspects of reform are negatively affected. It then goes on to look at the role of coordination – not just in terms of the clusters, but also at more general humanitarian coordination mechanisms. The report then turns to an aspect of the reform process that has been lacking to date, but which should become a more central part of all aspects of reform: accountability to affected populations. The issue of reformed financing is then examined in terms of its impact not only on the mapping countries, but also on humanitarian financing more generally. Finally, the report turns to what the Project will do in the coming two years to address some of the highlighted challenges so as to improve humanitarian outcomes for affected populations.

6 The costs of the humanitarian reform include the transaction costs associated with pooled funding, the increased staff time needed for consultative cluster coordination processes, the costs of dedicated cluster leadership or co-leadership and the risks that an intra-sectoral coordination system may lead to weaker inter-sectoral coordination.

Part 3
Leadership

"UN humanitarian leadership? There is none."
Donor, Afghanistan mapping study

3.1
A key spoke in the wheel of humanitarian reform

Leadership of the humanitarian sector is one of the three spokes of the reform. A three-spoke- wheel with one spoke missing cannot take much weight or move very far or very fast. Yet this defect is precisely what the mapping studies found. Strong humanitarian leadership by the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) can be seen in only one of the five study countries. Even in that country, however, there are tensions between the role of the RC and that of the HC.

While the humanitarian reform originally discussed leadership in the context of HCs, it has become clear that there is a need for strong leadership within the clusters as well – both at the global and country levels. By having strong HCs and strong cluster leads who understand the value of genuine partnerships, there is a greater chance of having more effective humanitarian responses that are accountable to affected populations.

3.2
Comparing the Humanitarian Coordinator and Resident Coordinator functions

Prior to the humanitarian reform, the norm was for the UN to appoint Resident Coordinators (RCs) as Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs): the so-called 'double-hatted' RC/HC. This norm remains in place today as the UN claims that the Inter-Agency Standing Committee or IASC (in which UN agencies have a majority presence) approves of this double-hatting. The RC is the UN's highest representative in a country; s/he leads the UN Country Team and ensures coordination of the UN's "operational activities for development" in conjunction with the government.[7] Clearly, this role can only be implemented through prioritising constructive relations with the government. The Humanitarian Response Review noted that many actors across the humanitarian sector did not approve of the double-hatted RC/HC position. Common objections were that RC/HCs were usually from a development background and had little knowledge of humanitarian response or the humanitarian system. This issue around the humanitarian expertise of HCs is not a new one: it was first raised shortly after the IASC was created in 1992, and continues to be a concern.[8] Another criticism was that RC/HCs were reluctant to confront the government on humanitarian issues out of fear of damaging the good relations so necessary for their RC role.

7 Job Description: Resident Coordinator for Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System, URL: www.humanitarianreform.org

8 Prasopa-Plaizier, M. (2008). Humanitarian Coordinators Pool Mapping Exercise: Report for the Inter Agency Standing Committee. Geneva: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. URL: www.humanitarianreform.org

"The tension between INGOs and the UN over advocacy on access and humanitarian principles highlights the problem of a dual-hatted Resident 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"
Ethiopia mapping study

The Humanitarian Response Review (HRR) concluded that, in order for HCs to carry out their role, the following skills were essential:

— independence from any agency, including his/her mother entity;
— a neutral position vis-à-vis the host government; and
— strong humanitarian experience and a mix of operational diplomatic and negotiation skills.

The HRR also noted that the responsibility for such a function does not allow wearing more than two hats at any one time.[9] At around the same time, the UN report on integrated missions[10] recommended that where there was an integrated mission, the HC should be double-hatted as a Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG). The contradictions inherent in such approaches are not lost on humanitarian actors on the ground, but nevertheless the UN system as a whole fails to confront them. It should be clear that RCs and HCs have different roles, responsibilities and constituencies. They also have distinct reporting lines, with the HC reporting to the ERC in New York and the RC reporting to the head of UNDP.[11] The primary constituency for the RC is the UN system and the government and his/her job is to coordinate the UN system in-country and ensure progress on RC system priorities.

The primary constituency for the HC consists of the operational humanitarian agencies, both within and outside the UN. The HC must build consensus amongst a wide range of stakeholders, and have a deep understanding of, and commitment to, humanitarian principles and standards (Code of Conduct, Sphere Standards, Principles of Partnership, etc.). The repeated efforts to increase professionalism in the sector to improve humanitarian response have resulted in a range of standards, approaches, and quality initiatives. It is this very complexity that means that HCs have to be very familiar with the humanitarian community if they are to provide credible humanitarian leadership. For RCs from a development background, NGOs are not within their constituency and may even be construed as a nuisance. While many will have some experience of working with NGOs through 'sector' coordination, it is the national government that generally takes the lead. The RC has little opportunity, or need, to work with NGOs.[12]

The expectations of an RC and the skills required are often very different from those of an HC. The RC is responsible for development operations, working closely with national governments to advocate the interests and mandates of the UN. Diplomacy and tact are key skills, and expectations are that movement towards goals and objectives may take years. In contrast, the humanitarian community operates on a different rhythm: acting quickly to save lives and reduce suffering, which means that the HC – as well as looking for diplomatic solutions – must sometimes behave in an undiplomatic way to ensure the primacy of the humanitarian response. Taking a stance against a government is something that an RC cannot afford to do, as the role of the RC is a diplomatic one, with government relations of prime importance. Both, however, should be able to pressure governments on specific policies.

9 Adinolfi C., ibid (see footnote 4)

10 Eide, E. B., Kaspersen, A. T., Kent, R., & Hippel, K. v. (2005). Report on Integrated Missions: Practical Perspectives and Recommendations: Independent Study for the Expanded UN ECHA Core Group. New York: UN Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA) URL: www.undg.org

11 The RC is usually, but not always, the Resident Representative of UNDP in the country to which he or she is appointed.

12 The exceptions to this statement are countries such as Bangladesh and India where the UN works closely with national NGOs.

3.2.1
Impartiality and responsiveness to NGO concerns

"The fact that the HC is also the RC and that he is not only dealing with humanitarian issues is said by some to have contributed to the difficulties"
Zimbabwe mapping study

The country studies illustrate the conflict between the RC and HC roles very clearly. Interviewees in the study countries gave many instances in which they felt that humanitarian issues had been sidelined because they were subsumed by RC considerations.

In Afghanistan, the RC/HC/DSRSG was seen as devoting his time largely to the RC/DSRSG functions and interviewees described UN humanitarian leadership as "incoherent" or "disjointed" or non-existent. Here the study found a conflict between the RC's role in support of the UN's state-building and development agenda and the HC's responsibility to highlight the extent of the conflict-related humanitarian crisis. In Afghanistan, there is a strong donor agenda in favour of the comprehensive approach. In a nutshell, the comprehensive approach views humanitarian action as another way in which governments can influence state-building. Colin Powell, former US Secretary of State, was talking about Afghanistan when he unhelpfully referred to international NGOs as "force multipliers" in the war on terror.[13]

While state-building, with its implicit support of the government, falls within the purview of the RC, it is not the aim of humanitarian action. In Afghanistan, the focus on state-building meant that until recently, any reference to a conflict-induced humanitarian crisis was 'unmentionable'. One senior UN official interviewed in Afghanistan commented that "when I arrived, I was shocked: the humanitarian crisis was something not to be mentioned in public".

In Ethiopia, NGO interviewees considered that the RC/HC had not challenged the government enough about upholding humanitarian principles in the Somali Region. Here the UN is too reliant on the government for operations – with the World Food Programme (WFP) relying on government for food distribution – to be able to effectively raise concerns.

In Zimbabwe, NGOs were very concerned about the closeness of the RC/HC to the government, and considered that he had been too passive in challenging the government over the NGO ban in 2008. The situation here was complicated by NGO and donor concerns over the head of OCHA, who did not consult NGOs before using their information in his communications with the government. At the time, he did not receive any guidance or support from the HC. The NGOs wrote about their concerns to the HC in October 2008, but never received a reply.

13 Stoddard, A., Harmer, A., & Haver, K. (2006). Providing aid in insecure environments: trends in policy and operations (HPG Report 23). London: The Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute. URL: www.odi.org.uk

"In Sudan, the RC/HC is also the nominal head of UNDP and the DSRSG. It is clearly impossible for one individual to fulfil all these different and sometimes conflicting roles, especially in such a large and complex situation"
Sudan mapping study

The situation in Sudan is further compounded by the fact that the RC/HC is also the nominal head of UNDP and the DSRSG. It is clearly impossible for one individual to fulfil all these different, and sometimes conflicting, roles, especially in a situation as large and complex as Sudan. It is not appropriate that the largest humanitarian operation in the world be led by a development specialist rather than a humanitarian specialist (notwithstanding the fact there are two very experienced humanitarian deputies, one each for Northern and Southern Sudan) because of the clear need to understand different ways of working and the principles of the sector[14] For example, despite many attempts by humanitarian NGOs in Sudan to get a seat on the security management team, the RC/HC has declined, even though there has been support from the ERC and the endorsement of Saving Lives Together by the UN.[15] This decision is rather bizarre given that the RC/HC reports to the ERC for the HC part of her job.

3.3
Where it works

The one bright spot is DRC, where the RC/HC displays strong humanitarian leadership. Interviewees there held the RC/HC in high regard and he plays an active role in overseeing and addressing any problems in the cluster coordination system. The HC's strong and effective leadership was seen as contributing to the effectiveness of the pooled funding mechanism and in attracting donor funding for it, given the confidence donors have in the HC. However, even in DRC, NGOs were concerned that there is sometimes a conflict between the roles of HC and RC that leads to decisions that are unfavourable from a humanitarian viewpoint.

14 Interviewees made clear that the DSRSG/RC/HC has many excellent qualities and is very able.

15 Saving Lives Together: A Framework for improving Security Arrangements among INGOs, NGOs and the UN in the Field. New York: United Nations. URL: www.icva.ch/doc00001990.pdf This situation of NGOs being refused access to a security management team is not unique to Sudan, NGOs report that a similar situation occurs in many other countries.

"Donor confidence in the HC has been one of the factors in attracting significant contributions to the Pooled Fund and has moved the DRC out of 'aid orphan' status"
DRC mapping study

3.4
The new system: plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose

In the mid 1990s, the IASC had established what was to be a pool of Humanitarian Coordinators that could be drawn upon in times of emergency. This pool, however, never quite seemed to materialise until the reform process focused on HCs. In February 2005, the UK Secretary of State Hilary Benn said, "I would like to see OCHA open up the recruitment process for Humanitarian Coordinators beyond the UN family, to include experienced people from NGOs."[16] The UN took up this challenge and eventually created a pool for HCs, which invited applications from individuals outside the UN.

However, existing members of the RC pool who were HCs at the time were added to the HC pool, leading to the contradictory situation where a number of potential Humanitarian Coordinators had limited humanitarian experience and/or training, even though one of the aims of the HC pool is to "increase the share of individuals with humanitarian experience."[17] This approach conflicts with the requirement even in the 2003 Terms of Reference that: "The Humanitarian Coordinator is expected to possess specific knowledge and experience of the humanitarian environment and to have demonstrated leadership in complex emergencies." [18]

One non-UN Humanitarian Coordinator was appointed from the HC Pool created in 2006, but the Ugandan government did not recognise her appointment[19] and no further appointments of anyone from a purely non-UN background from that HC pool have subsequently been made.

Given a number of criticisms of that HC pool, OCHA led the process to revamp the pool through more stringent procedures in 2008. Applications were accepted for this new pool in the first quarter of 2009 and there is an inter-agency process, including NGO participation, which firstly screens applicants, and then assesses them through interview panels. Following acceptance to the pool, candidates are to undergo training on core humanitarian issues, such as International Humanitarian Law. The pool list, published in early July 2009, had 19 members, four of which were from non-UN agencies (three NGO people and one IFRC person). The recruitment process will continue throughout 2009, with a target of 30 members in the pool.

16 Benn, H. (2005). Keeping our Promises: 2005 and Beyond: Speech by Mr Hilary Benn MP: UK Secretary of State for International Development. London: DfID. URL: www.unmillenniumproject.org

17 OCHA HRSU. (2008). Coordinators: HC Pool Development. Humanitarian Reform. URL: www.humanitarianreform.org

18 United Nations. (2003b). Revised Terms of Reference for the Humanitarian Coordinator. New York: United Nations. URL: www.humanitarianreform.org

19 The reasons are complex and various explanations are offered, including that the whole appointment process was badly handled and that the Ugandan government objected to the appointment of a stand-alone Humanitarian Coordinator as Uganda is not a failed state, one of the conditions in which stand-alone HCs have been appointed in the past.

The biggest challenge facing non-UN candidates in the HC pool is that the UN generally continues to appoint RCs as HCs. Clearly, it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for a candidate from a non-UN background to fill the RC role. Thus, adopting the double-hatted RC/HC as the norm effectively means that only those with experience of working inside the UN can take on the HC role. Currently, the only stand-alone HC – in Pakistan (appointed in June 2009) – comes from a UN agency, which gives those in the HC Pool with only NGO or Red Cross/Red Crescent experience little chance of being appointed as an HC.

Although the option for separation of the HC and RC formally remains, the ERC seems in effect to have abandoned the practice of having separate HCs except in the most exceptional circumstances.[20] The IASC has specified under what conditions separation might be appropriate, but there is no clear process by which the IASC can have a discussion as to whether or not separation should take place in a particular country. In the case of the Pakistan HC's appointment, for example, there was no consultation with the IASC on the separation. Reportedly, this discussion took place in the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA) a "UN only" body. Even when there is a decision to have a separate HC, there is no clear process for selecting a suitable candidate.

While the appointment of HCs is an ERC decision, he is meant to carry it out in consultation with the IASC (unless they are already pre-approved candidates in the HC pool). In reality, this consultation process is much more a rubber stamping process than a genuine consultation. Candidates are usually proposed to the IASC with very few days to object. For NGO consortia on the IASC, for example, such a timeline makes it next to impossible to carry out a thorough consultation with members on the appropriateness of potential HCs. If the HC appointment process is to be a genuine one, where NGO partners' views are taken seriously, for example, the ERC needs to take the lead in developing a more transparent and inclusive process for deciding where separation should take place and for selecting appropriate candidates. In addition, a similar process should be set up for Deputy HCs (DHCs) as currently, the IASC is not consulted on, nor even informed of DHC appointments.

The slow pace of implementation of the humanitarian reform agenda is further underlined by the fact that it was only in early 2009 that revised terms of reference for HCs were completed, nearly six years after the last revision in 2003, and four years after the humanitarian reforms began.[21]

20 For example, in Myanmar following Cyclone Nargis in 2008 when the RC had just started in the country about a week before the cyclone, and in Pakistan in June 2009 following the mass displacement in the Swat Valley.

21 The new Terms of Reference contain no reference to the need for the HC to have any humanitarian experience whatsoever. The competencies required for HCs include humanitarian experience as a requirement, but it is not an absolute one. Revised Terms of Reference for the Humanitarian Coordinator. New York: United Nations. URL: www.humanitarianreform.org

3.5
Measuring HC performance

Given the nature of the humanitarian system, it is clear that leadership is not automatically accepted. An HC may be a nominal leader, but the humanitarian community will not look to the HC unless they are convinced that the HC can provide strong humanitarian leadership. NGOs thought that the HCs should play a stronger role in several of the study countries, which suggests that one of the performance criteria for HCs could be the respect and positive evaluation that they receive from the broader humanitarian community. While there is a performance appraisal system for HCs in place, the utility of this system has yet to be proven. The ERC is responsible for ensuring that there is an up to date Compact between the ERC and HC. Yet according to data compiled in October 2008 by the Humanitarian Reform Tracking Tool, only seven of 16 countries that responded had fully implemented Compacts, while five had partially implemented Compacts and four had not implemented Compacts at all.[22] Numerous HCs are seen as weak by many in the humanitarian community, yet these same HCs continue to be posted in other locations.

The same performance criteria could potentially be applied to cluster leadership (see Part 4). Measuring such performance can be difficult because of concerns that criticism of the HC or of the cluster lead may damage relationships or even damage future funding from pooled mechanisms. One possibility is to have a ranking site [23] where agencies can rank the performance of cluster leads and of HCs. Such a site might be managed by one of the NGOs interested in promoting transparency and more effective humanitarian leadership.

22 The last reported survey data for the Cluster Tracking Tool was from October 2008. 10 OCHA heads of offices did not reply to the survey. These were: Ethiopia, Guinea, Haiti, Iraq, Myanmar, Niger, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Timor Leste and Uganda.

23 This type of website is used for the rating of teachers by their pupils, where there can also be a very unequal power relationship. While not popular with teachers, who feel that they may become the victims of students with a grudge against them, children report that the contributions to such sites are a reasonably fair summary of their teachers' popularity. In particular they note that strong unjustified attacks by one user are quickly criticised by other users. While such sites are not perfect, they offer the possibility of more oversight than is currently the case.

3.6
Leadership's impact on the other elements of reform

In the broader context of reform, leadership – or lack thereof – has a direct impact on the success or failure of the reform elements in a country. The quality of leadership within individual clusters can make the difference between effective functioning and inefficiency. Time and time again, it has been pointed out that if the right people are in place to lead a cluster, it tends to work relatively well. Not only do cluster leads need to have technical expertise, but they must also know how to work in an inclusive, partnership-oriented manner. If there are strong cluster leads in place, they should ensure that the cluster is also looking at accountability to affected populations, for example. While some clusters plan to have rosters of good cluster leads, there is still some way to go before clusters can reliably provide strong leaders.

Some have suggested that having NGO co-leads of country level clusters could provide greater leadership. One positive aspect might be that such a co-lead could help keep UN agency interests out of the cluster, but the same constraints would also need to apply with regard to the interests of the NGO co-lead (see further discussion in Part 4 section 6).

The role of leadership in inter-cluster coordination is also key – whether it be OCHA's role in bringing together the various clusters (in support of the HC) or the role of the HC in bringing together Humanitarian Country Teams or other coordination mechanisms. A strong leader will ensure that inter-cluster coordination highlights any gap areas and will find ways to fill those gaps in humanitarian response. If appropriate leadership is in place, accountability to affected populations will be taken into consideration in humanitarian response – including by pushing clusters to take such accountability seriously. Good leaders will also work towards meaningful partnerships in coordination mechanisms, for example.

When it comes to the various funding mechanisms introduced under the reform, it is evident that strong leadership is essential to make the most efficient use of the funds (see Part 6). Pooled funds, for example, are a means of enabling HCs to allocate funds to priority needs. However, if the HC is unclear on how to best meet humanitarian needs, the funds may not be best used. Where there is strong humanitarian leadership, donors seem to be more inclined to establish, and contribute to, pooled funds as they feel that their money will be well spent.

Part 4
Coordination

4.1
Introduction

Perhaps the most visible aspect of the reform process and the strongest spoke in the chariot wheel, to date, has been the cluster approach. Over the past four years, the UN language around the clusters has evolved into talking more about improved coordination in general than just clusters, particularly at the field level. For coordination to lead to better humanitarian responses, there are a number of factors that must be in place. These include strong leadership, genuine partnerships and improved accountability towards affected populations, as well as to donors. While some of these elements are in place, the mapping studies have shown that much work remains to be done.

There is, however, the risk of coordination overload. In many situations, a frequent complaint from NGOs is that there are too many meetings – whether they be cluster meetings, inter-cluster meetings, or general coordination meetings. While coordination is essential, it must also be efficient and effective. The move towards more inclusive Humanitarian Country Teams in several countries, including the mapping study countries (although the names and terms of reference vary), is a welcome step forward. What remains essential in all coordination structures – whether at the field or global levels – is that all stakeholders are genuinely able to engage, be heard and be taken seriously. Without such genuine partnerships, the risk is that coordination structures alienate those who carry out the bulk of the work – namely local, national and international NGOs. Once again, without effective leadership, coordination structures rarely meet these essential goals.

4.2
The introduction of the cluster approach

The cluster approach has been characterised by some as a new approach to the coordination of humanitarian response in situations of internal displacement.[24] Others have seen the cluster approach as a renaming of the more traditional sectoral approach. The clusters, however, have been specifically tasked with providing 'high standards of predictability, accountability and partnership in all sectors or areas of activity.'[25] The 2006 Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) guidance note called for the application of the cluster approach in all countries with Humanitarian Coordinators.[26] While 25 out of 27 countries with HCs have clusters (at the time of writing), the recent example of Pakistan shows that even though clusters may be in place in name, they do not necessarily

24 The origin of the cluster approach lies in the response to IDPs, as UNHCR has a mandate to coordinate a refugee response. Prior to the clusters, the "collaborative approach" to IDPs was in place, which had agencies working together under the leadership of the HC. The collaborative approach was generally hampered by poor leadership from HCs, which meant that it was not particularly effective. By assigning responsibilities to agencies for particular sectoral responses, the hope was that the response to IDPs would improve.

25 IASC. (2006). Guidance note on using the cluster approach to strengthen humanitarian response. Geneva: Inter-Agency Standing Committee. URL: www.humanitarianreform.org

26 IASC. (2006). Ibid page 2.

"Too many meetings, too many expats, too much English"
An NNGO country director, Afghanistan

function as originally intended. DRC was one of the original cluster roll-out countries in 2006. Clusters were introduced more slowly in the other study countries: in May 2007 for Ethiopia; in the second half of 2007 for Zimbabwe; in April 2008 for Afghanistan; and in December 2008 for Sudan. One senior UN official expressed surprise that, despite being the 'birthplace' of the reform, clusters were still not working in Darfur, Sudan well into 2009.

NGOs varied in their approach to the clusters in the mapping study countries. Some NGOs pushed for their introduction in Afghanistan because they saw the need for improved humanitarian coordination. Many NGOs resisted clusters in Zimbabwe as the process was seen as UN-centric, and introduced without sufficient consultation with, or buy-in from, non-UN actors. Within countries, attitudes of agencies towards clusters varied by agency and by cluster. More generally, for many NGOs the jury is still out as to whether or not they view the clusters as effective or efficient. One consortium member noted that field staff consistently complain of the poor performance of clusters in various countries, prompting questions internally about what level of engagement they should have with the clusters.

4.3
Clusters or sectors?

There are a number of differences between sectors and clusters. The biggest – at least on paper – is the way in which those involved work together and cooperate, both in setting the cluster strategy and in implementing the response. The training material for cluster leads emphasises that leading a cluster requires "a change in mindset from a directive leadership to [a] collaborative approach, a shift from...unilateral decision-making to shared decision-making and consensus management."[27] For partnership in the clusters to be genuine, there is a need for true involvement of all cluster participants. The cluster approach aimed to improve performance by having predictable leadership supported by cluster participants. Cluster leads and participants should work together to identify gaps in response and jointly strategise on finding solutions. Of course, in order to clearly identify gaps, needs assessments must be shared in a systematic manner. This can sometimes be problematic as competition for funding and a lack of trust can reduce organisations' willingness to share information.

UN documentation makes great play on the role of the cluster lead agency as the provider of last resort (POLR). However, this role is a red herring as this responsibility is subject to capacity, as well as security and the availability of resources. Where there is security and funding, there is normally no need for a POLR as some agency can usually be found to work there. In the case of the shelter cluster, the IFRC has taken on the role of 'convenor' without assuming the responsibility of being POLR.

Many interviewees in the mapping studies found great difficulty in distinguishing between cluster and sectoral coordination approaches.[28] One interviewee in Afghanistan was surprised that INGOs were enthusiastic

27 OCHA. (2007a). Collaborative Leadership (Tips and Resources: IASC Cluster/Sector Leadership Training). Geneva: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. URL: ocha.unog.

28 A surprisingly large number of interviewees were ill-informed about the whole humanitarian reform process.

"One day we were suddenly a cluster"
An INGO staff member, Zimbabwe

about the roll-out of the cluster approach, characterising it as 'time consuming and resource intensive'. The cluster approach demands a lot more time from both the cluster lead and the participants, as building consensus takes longer than a more directive approach. The cluster approach also needs cluster leads free of their agency responsibilities, both to avoid conflicts of interest between agency and cluster interests, and because of the time demand. A question also remains as to whether clusters should be used as a mechanism for allocating funding to projects vetted by clusters (see Part 6).

4.4
Has the cluster approach been implemented?

The rosy picture of adoption of the cluster approach in all of the study countries is misleading. The mapping studies make clear that, in many cases, the introduction of the cluster approach was a semantic exercise, without any real change in the way in which coordination was run. In Sudan, the Humanitarian Country Team only agreed to the introduction of the cluster approach on the basis that it was just a change of name without any other changes. The limitations of this have surfaced in Darfur, the only part of the country applying the cluster approach, where cluster leads appealed for (and received from the Common Humanitarian Fund) US$ 2.6 million in order to roll out the clusters between September and the end of 2009. The expulsion of 12 INGOs and one private contractor and the closing of three national NGOs in March 2009 have also had an impact on how clusters function as there are fewer NGOs able to participate in, and influence, the work of the clusters in Darfur. Clusters must function on a shared commitment to delivery and performance if they are to meet humanitarian needs effectively. The overnight change from a sector to a cluster in Zimbabwe demonstrates that the change was in name only for some clusters.

The level of engagement of NGOs with the cluster mechanism depends on a number of factors. Chief of these is the perception of the value added by the cluster. Clusters that were better managed, had a strategic focus, were action-oriented, and were coordinated by full-time and experienced staff were the most highly regarded by interviewees. NGOs are more likely to actively participate in a cluster if they feel their concerns and views are being taken seriously and that the time spent in cluster meetings adds value to their work. Clusters that simply share information will have limited value for NGOs that are already stretched for time and human resources.

At the time the mapping studies research was conducted, not only were there relatively few NGO co-leads (see 4.6 below), but there were even fewer dedicated cluster coordinators. The coordination processes were sometimes far from collaborative, as with some clusters in Sudan, or clusters were present only in the capital, as in Afghanistan (with the exception of the Protection cluster). Such factors contribute to the view that NGOs have of clusters and will help to determine their participation (or lack thereof).

"The coordination meetings in Harare are a waste of time, but it is necessary to go"
An NGO emergency coordinator, Zimbabwe

There appears to be very little donor engagement with the cluster processes or with the humanitarian reform as a whole at country level, which is surprising given the extent to which the donors have funded the reform initiatives. Donor funding provided US$25 million for the 2006 Global Cluster appeal[29] and US$32.8 million for the follow-on appeal in 2007.[30] One of the welcome recommendations coming out of the annual donor retreat in Montreux in 2009 was to include cluster coordination in the Consolidated Appeal Processes (CAP). Support for cluster coordination by donors is essential for clusters to be run effectively and this support must also apply to NGO cluster co-leads. One of the outstanding challenges for most clusters is to better incorporate accountability to affected populations into their assessments and responses. Again, the issue of strong, effective leadership plays a role in implementing such accountability within clusters.

4.5
What makes an effective cluster?

The Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) cluster was often cited in the mapping studies as the most effective cluster. The reasons for this compliment varied, but a prominent one was staffing: in Afghanistan, WASH had a full-time coordinator; there was full-time staff support in Ethiopia; UNICEF staff in DRC had cluster-related responsibilities included in their job descriptions, making the WASH cluster one of the most successful in DRC; and in Zimbabwe, not only was there a very active INGO co-chair for the WASH cluster, but also a respected cluster lead with previous cluster experience. In Sudan, however, the WASH cluster coordinator also had extensive management responsibilities for his own agency's programme, leaving the WASH cluster as one of those most frequently criticised by interviewees.

Probably one of the most important factors in the global WASH cluster's success was that, prior to the introduction of the clusters, a number of WASH actors were already meeting and this group came to constitute the majority of the global WASH cluster. For the first three years of the cluster system, Oxfam seconded a senior staff member to be global WASH coordinator. He holds the respect of NGOs and has a wide network of working relationships. WASH also has a critical mass in terms of membership, which helps it maintain momentum at the global and field levels. The WASH cluster demonstrates the potential outcomes that the cluster approach can achieve when the cluster leads invest resources in the role and NGOs are supportive on global, national and local levels.

The DRC research identified that, beyond the importance of leadership for effective cluster functioning, the participants also play an important role: dynamic involvement above and beyond attending meetings, technical competence and consistency of engagement all contribute towards building an effective cluster.[31] Trust between the participants is also important, as well as transparency around funding applications submitted through the cluster (see Part 6).

29 OCHA. (2007c). Report on Implementation of Global Cluster Capacity Building 1 April 2006–31 March 2007. New York: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Last viewed on 16 April 2009. URL: ochadms.unog.ch

30 OCHA. Report on Implementation of Global Capacity Building, April 1, 2007 – March 31, 2009 New York: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Last viewed 14 September 2009. URL: www.humanitarianreform.org

31 Martlew, N. (January 2009). Clusters in the DRC: turning theory into good practice.. Unpublished paper written by the Humanitarian Reform Adviser for the Consortium of NGOs in DRC: ACF, CARE, IRC, Oxfam, and Save the Children

4.6
Cluster co-leads

"Interviewees made complaints that some of the sector leads put their agency responsibility ahead of their cluster responsibility"
Sudan mapping study

Some NGOs consider a co-leadership role of clusters to be another expression of partnership, whereas others are not so positive about the concept. There is obviously no single view within the NGO community on the role. There are questions around whether they should be 'co-leads', 'co-chairs', 'co-conveners' or 'co-facilitators' (hereinafter referred to as 'co-lead' for brevity), particularly when it comes to how (or if) the cluster lead agency's accountabilities and responsibilities (such as provider of last resort) should be shared with a co-lead. At the time of writing, attempts were being made to clarify the role, which may help NGOs take a clearer position on co-leadership. The mapping studies found that the UN had problems in some countries in getting co-leads at the national level. There are no NGO co-leads in Sudan; in Ethiopia, the government fills the co-lead role; in Zimbabwe, less than half the clusters have NGO co-leads; and there are three NGO deputy leaders in Afghanistan. In DRC, NGO co-leadership is constrained by the level of NGO commitment to the process rather than a lack of requests.

While UN agencies are funded by donors for their cluster lead functions, many NGOs lack the resources to enable them to allocate sufficient staff time. The primary function of NGO technical staff is to support the in-country work by ensuring quality and relevance rather than to support UN functions. What is clear is that if individual NGOs decide to take on co-leads of country-level clusters, there is a need for donors to provide greater support, as most NGOs do not have the resources to be able to dedicate staff to co-lead a cluster.

4.7
NGO participation in country-level clusters

Beyond the potential benefits of cluster participation, there are also high hidden costs of participation for NGOs. Coordination can be time and resource intensive, and if it is poorly managed, the costs of participation amplify, which is perhaps one of the biggest impediments for NGOs to engage. Some NGOs have been burned by bad experiences particularly in the early roll-out of the global clusters, whilst others have voted with their feet, evaluating that the benefits are outweighed by the high cost of participation.

In the mapping study countries there was relatively little engagement of national (NNGOs) and local NGOs (LNGOs), especially at the national level. Clusters are quite demanding of staff time for participants: not only in terms of meetings, but also in dealing with information produced by the clusters, which can restrict the chances for many NGOs with limited capacity to engage with clusters. Poor consideration of local languages also excludes access to the clusters in Sudan and Afghanistan, and to a lesser extent in Zimbabwe. Participation by NNGOs in coordination mechanisms in Zimbabwe is low, with the mechanisms seen by NNGOs as not being inclusive enough. The absence of clusters outside the capital (as in Afghanistan) also limits LNGO access. Where there are clusters outside of the capital, as in DRC and Sudan, there is more engagement by local and national NGOs.

"A few NGO interviewees pointed out that it is difficult for NGOs to question or challenge the lead agency if they are dependent on it for funding or if they feel that they could lose out on future pooled fund money"
DRC mapping study

A further complication for NGOs is their relationship with the cluster lead agencies if they receive funding from that agency. In both DRC and Sudan, there were issues where INGO interviewees indicated that they were not raising specific issues with cluster leads because of relationship considerations. INGOs may have the international muscle to obtain funding from a cluster lead even if local relations are not good. NNGOs and LNGOs often do not have close relations with these donors and therefore, must manage the relationships more carefully.

Local and national NGOs may also be unwittingly excluded because they are often left out of clusters' capacity mapping exercises. Not only does this oversight leave a noticeable gap in clusters' analyses of the true picture of response capacity, but it also ignores and marginalises the wealth of knowledge that local and national NGOs have.

There also remains the stubborn reality, identified in the mapping studies research, that many humanitarian actors – particularly national and local NGOs – are not sufficiently informed about humanitarian reform or its potential benefits for response. This situation is compounded by the fact that some NGOs that participate in clusters do not send sufficiently senior staff to the meetings. As a result, some NGOs see their role in the clusters as passive, taking directions from the cluster lead rather than using the cluster as a forum to influence others and to provide capacity to support the cluster process and humanitarian response effort.

Often international NGOs' local partners in emergency response are also their longer-term development partners, or become so as the crisis transitions into recovery and development. This relationship offers INGOs the possibility to support local NGO partners to enhance their capacities and to support them to build contacts with clusters, as well as with international donors.

These realities illustrate the challenges of putting into practice fine-sounding intentions, such as the Principles of Partnership. To go some way to making improvements, it is important the INGOs and the UN recognise and seek to address these power imbalances.

4.8
Inter-cluster coordination

One of the concerns about the cluster approach is that strong intra-cluster coordination can weaken interest in inter-sector or inter-cluster (or cross-cluster) coordination. This concern is also raised about the pooled funding mechanisms, such as the CHF in Sudan, which funds by sector. Projects that are multi-sectoral in nature tend to lose out in such situations.

Humanitarian needs are not normally found in one sector alone. Effective humanitarian response demands effective inter-cluster coordination, yet there is no consensus on a systematic way of ensuring this, even in obviously linked clusters such as WASH, Logistics and Shelter. At the same time, there have been efforts to improve inter-cluster coordination between, for example, the Health, Nutrition and WASH clusters. In addition, there is a need to ensure that cross-cutting issues, like gender, environment or HIV/AIDS, are also brought into broader coordination efforts.

Effective inter-cluster coordination requires both strong humanitarian leadership and an effective OCHA office. In countries where the HC has other responsibilities, such as being the RC or DSRSG, engagement in these types of processes tends to be limited. The appointment of a Deputy HC is one possible way to address this gap, as has been the case in Sudan, but it is only a partial solution. Of course, many questions remain about the process for appointing Deputy HCs, not to mention the risk of HCs in such situations delegating their responsibilities.

4.9
Humanitarian Country Teams and similar structures

One way of ensuring inter-cluster coordination, or better overall coordination in humanitarian response, is through broad-based coordination teams, such as Humanitarian Country Teams, led by the HC and supported by a strong OCHA office. A positive finding of the mapping studies is that NGO presence on such coordination structures is becoming more commonplace, and that the NGO voice is heard, at least to some extent.

All five of the study countries have some form of joint NGO-UN humanitarian country team structure, although the arrangements differ from country to country. The countries vary in the extent to which language (English in four cases and French in one) and the use of jargon by the international community was a barrier to local participation in coordination mechanisms. Having limited numbers of senior staff who can play an effective role in coordination mechanisms hampered participation of some NNGOs and smaller INGOs. In Sudan, there is an HCT that has three INGO members selected by the INGO forum. Ethiopia has an HCT with three INGO representatives and one representative of an NGO umbrella group (of NNGOs and INGOs). The Afghan HCT meets monthly, with five elected NGO representatives and Red Cross/Red Crescent observers. The IASC Country Team in Zimbabwe has five INGO

representatives. A complex arrangement of inter-agency forums in the DRC has local IASC meetings at the provincial and capital levels, which can be attended by LNGOs, NNGOs and INGOs.

The inconsistency between different country coordination structures – not only in the mapping countries, but also elsewhere – may be partly caused by the various types of coordination bodies that have been created. On 26 February 2006, the ERC wrote to HCs instructing them to set up IASC Country Teams, with little direction about how these should be structured. Some countries have taken forward this instruction, but several have not done so. In July 2006, when the Global Humanitarian Platform was formed, participants also agreed to establish Humanitarian Community Partnership Teams, now more commonly referred to as Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) in several countries. These teams were envisaged "to be separate from the UN country team and draw equally on representation from international and national NGOs, the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement and UN humanitarian organisations".[32] The HCTs would seek ways "to strengthen collaborative work at the field level".[33] There are now efforts within the IASC to produce guidance for HCTs, but without being prescriptive so that contextual factors can be taken into consideration in each country.

Whilst this lack of consistency between the various coordination mechanisms makes the system seem more ad hoc, it also allows for flexibility to adapt to local circumstances. From an NGO perspective, this flexibility is necessary in order to ensure independence from the UN in certain situations. Particularly in conflict and post-conflict settings, where NGOs are carrying out humanitarian activities against a backdrop of UN integrated missions, UN peacekeeping forces and/or complex security demands, they need to be able to ensure their independence from the UN and not be coordinated or governed by the UN.

An outstanding issue in the various coordination mechanisms – whether they be clusters or broader coordination bodies – remains the extent to which partners' views are taken seriously in these bodies. The way in which cluster lead agencies implement and support cluster coordination has a large impact on the perceptions of partnership. While the UN will continue to have discussions within UN Country Teams, the challenge is to make Humanitarian Country Teams (or similar bodies) more effective and efficient in contributing to improved humanitarian responses.

32 Egeland, J. and Beth Ferris, B. (2006). Chairs' Summary: Geneva, Switzerland, 12–13 July 2006, URL: www.globalhumanitarianplatform.org/doc00001844.html

33 Egeland and Ferris (2006) Ibid.

Part 5
Accountability

5.1
Accountability to crisis-affected communities

When the reform process started, one of the glaring gaps was accountability to affected populations. There was a great deal of emphasis placed on the accountability of the global cluster leads to the Emergency Relief Coordinator and of country cluster leads to the HC. HCs are also accountable to the ERC (see Part 2). In the context of financing, accountability for the spending of funds was built into the CERF, as well as the pooled funds (see Part 6). One of the biggest challenges for humanitarian reform in the coming years will be to focus on accountability to affected populations, also called 'downward accountability'.

5.2
Putting crisis-affected people at the centre

Accountability applies to all humanitarian actors (governments, donors, inter-governmental organisations, NGOs) that in different humanitarian contexts and spaces exert power over individuals affected by their action. Traditionally, humanitarian accountability has tended to focus on accountability to donors and other more powerful stakeholders with little accountability to the least powerful, but most affected, stakeholder group: crisis-affected populations. Since the mid-1990s, the NGO community has developed a number of quality and accountability initiatives that focus on accountability to affected populations (see section 5.3 below)[34]. During relief operations, operational agencies – UN and INGOs in particular – can command tremendous financial, logistical, as well as cultural power. Intense pressure to act quickly to save lives and to meet the reporting demands of their own organisations, increases the chances that this power is used either irresponsibly (e.g. excluding the most vulnerable through poor understanding of the context) or criminally (e.g. demanding sex in return for food aid). Corruption – whether for personal, social, or political gain (the latter category including, for example, organisational reputation) – is in itself an abuse of power and can take many forms, including bias in the allocation of aid.[35]

34 For example, the 1994 Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards, and the Ombudsman Project, which later became Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International (HAP).

35 Maxwell, D., Walker, P., Harvey, P., et al. (2008). Preventing corruption in Humanitarian Assistance: Final Research Report. Transparency International. URL: www.odi.org.uk

"Many interviewees made the point that it was not possible to say whether the humanitarian reforms were having any impact on service to beneficiaries. They questioned the link between internal processes in the aid system and the provision of services to beneficiaries"
Sudan mapping study

"Overall accountability to beneficiaries is still seen as a challenge. Most agencies rely on community meetings or need to leave it to their implementing partners who work at grass roots level"
Zimbabwe mapping study

Agencies, therefore, need to seek ways to redress the imbalance of power and to improve their accountability to disaster affected communities through mechanisms such as: information sharing and transparency; meaningful participation in decision making; responsiveness to feedback; and making people aware of the standard of response they have a right to expect. Lessons learned so far show that leadership is critical in putting in place such mechanisms.

Empirical evidence in favour of strengthening downward accountability is compelling: it enhances the effectiveness of response, mitigates the risk of corruption and positively impacts on people's lives. It is also argued that accountability is not solely about improving impact (a means to an end), but is also a matter of principle (an end in itself). From a rights-based perspective, the exercise of power without responsibility and accountability is an abuse of that power. By the same token, good downward accountability has outcomes for the beneficiaries (such as being able to engage in decision-making processes, having voice and agency, having access to information and respectful and trusting relationships) which help to fulfil their right to life with dignity – a fundamental human right at the heart of the international legal framework.[36]

5.3
NGO led-initiatives to strengthen accountability

There are many external drivers of strengthened accountability. High profile disasters, such as the tsunami, have placed a stronger media spotlight on NGOs, bringing visibility and the challenge of criticism. Major donor and multi-agency evaluations of humanitarian response continue to call for more rigorous performance management, increased professionalisation and regulation of humanitarian NGOs, as well as highlighting the need for the sector to tackle corruption, issues of local ownership and the continued lack of downward accountability.[37]

Internal programmatic commitments and external drivers have resulted in several inter-agency quality and accountability initiatives, such as the 1994 Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, the Sphere Project and the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership. Agencies are increasingly committed to being held accountable to these international standards and principles. They are learning about the barriers that prevent the rhetoric of accountability from being translated into effective practice so as to overcome them. The peer review on accountability to disaster-affected populations conducted in 2009 by the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response, with UNHCR, is one such example. It remains unclear why so little attention was paid to these initiatives at the time of the roll-out of the humanitarian reform process.

36 For further evidence of the need and justification for improved accountability see Borton, J. 2008. The 2008 Humanitarian Accountability Report: Chapter 1: An Overview of Humanitarian Accountability in 2008. URL: www.hapinternational.org

37 Tsunami Evaluation Coalition. (2006). Joint evaluation of the international response to the Indian Ocean tsunami: Synthesis Report. URL: www.alnap.org

"The IDPs in the camps were very frustrated and felt that no one listened to them but they were also afraid of taking problems to the aid agencies directly"
DRC mapping study

"A few interviewees admitted that short donor timeframes for the submission of proposals meant that they had little time to consult crisis-affected communities before writing proposals"
Ethiopia mapping study

Findings from Afghanistan and Ethiopia highlight how the operating environment shapes accountability relationships. In Afghanistan, prior to 2001 there had been a tacit social contract that bound communities and NGOs together, providing feedback on activities and advance warning if there were security risks to the outsiders. This contract is now greatly frayed. NGOs have lost the aura of respect that they had in Taliban times when they were the only visible manifestation of the outside world's commitment to helping Afghans. In addition, government, media and even donors have been critical of NGOs; they have been tarred with the same brush as private contractors and they have been confused with the Provincial Reconstruction Teams and even Special Forces that, like humanitarian actors worldwide, drive around in white vehicles. Accountability to beneficiaries is also negatively affected by deteriorating security and, specifically, by the inability of international NGO staff – and increasingly national staff – to visit field offices and project sites. In Ethiopia, the government has severely restricted access to communities in the Somali region, making it difficult for NGOs to build close relations with affected communities.

5.4
Overall performance benchmarks to enhance accountability and learning

Interviewees in all the mapping studies generally believed that it is simply not possible to assess the impact of humanitarian reforms on services to affected communities, or in terms of increasing participation in humanitarian response – in part because no processes have been established for measuring the impact of clusters or financing mechanisms. In Sudan, some interviewees argued that some aspects of the reforms have increased the operating costs of agencies without delivering any benefit to the affected population.

On a positive note, the piloting of Inter-Agency Real-Time Evaluations (IA-RTE) has the potential to introduce a system of inter-agency performance review, which could improve accountability and learning and thus enhance the humanitarian reform process. However, in order to achieve this goal effectively, the real-time evaluations would need terms of reference and methodology that specifically address accountability to crisis-affected people. The IASC is currently undertaking a review of the three IA-RTEs undertaken to date (in Mozambique, Pakistan and Myanmar), which will look critically at the utility of the tool and the variety of approaches that have been employed. The fact that NGO engagement and downward accountability is a lens for the review is a welcome opportunity that can help advance the meaningful integration of NGO and community perspectives through the use of this sector-wide evaluation tool.

"The international community and donors come here with their own project ideas and don't consult either the government or the people. Our feeling is that the money goes back to the donors. Money comes in the door and goes out the window"
Local government representative, Afghanistan mapping study

5.5
Role of clusters in implementing and promoting accountability to communities

Although the Terms of Reference for Sector/Cluster Leads at the Country Level calls on clusters to ensure that participatory and community-based approaches are used, there has been little focus on monitoring and improving downward accountability mechanisms within the framework of the humanitarian reforms. Whilst individual agencies within clusters emphasise adherence to specific standards and codes to differing degrees, the individual clusters need to find ways of strengthening accountability and fostering a shared commitment to accountability. Different clusters have, or are developing, performance review tools, many of which involve requesting feedback from a range of stakeholders, including crisis-affected communities. However, there are very few examples to date of the application of these tools in order to test them for their improvement and adoption, and for learning across clusters about approaches and tools that can be implemented in the throes of a response.

The IA-RTE of the response to Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar found deficiencies in feedback and complaints systems meant that complaints received by clusters were forwarded to concerned agencies instead of being followed up. The RTE recommended that clusters improve their accountability systems to enable them to monitor how complaints have been acted upon and to feedback to stakeholders in crisis-affected communities.[38] In addition, the report asks clusters to consider undertaking "outreach activities" in order to support information provision to communities, seek feedback from local stakeholders and to help verify Who, What, Where (WWW) information. Such a role could engender shared values, mutual learning and coordinated action by individual cluster members towards improved accountability.

A full-time NGO Liaison Officer based in Yangon in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis supported the work of, and relations between, INGOs, national NGOs and the UN, including supporting partnerships that uphold the Principles of Partnership, facilitating information exchange between NGOs and clusters, and promoting accountability to the affected population through establishing an inter-agency Accountability and Learning Working Group (ALWG).[39] The IA-RTE team reflected that the substantial NGO involvement in the RTE process was thanks to the NGO Liaison Officer post, and recommended that the model be tested further, including at 'hub' level to ensure national actors are better integrated into planning and coordination exercises.

In Ethiopia and DRC, clusters and other coordination mechanisms have tried to ensure that they identify and fill gaps in assistance provision. But the clusters are not focused on communication with, and accountability to, crisis-affected communities. This role could potentially be helpful in ensuring more timely and effective humanitarian aid, but clusters have been extremely reluctant to take on this additional responsibility. The result is that there are no mechanisms to allow the voices of crisis-affected communities to be heard in clusters, even indirectly through community-based organisations or local NGOs.

38 Turner, R., Baker, J., Oo, Z. M., Aye, N. S. (2008). Inter-Agency Real Time Evaluation of Response to Cyclone Nargis. UN OCHA on behalf of IASC. URL: ochaonline.un.org

39 Extracts from Johnson, E., (December 2009) HAP and Sphere focal points in Myanmar: early lessons Humanitarian Exchange Magazine, published by HPN at ODI, URL: www.odihpn.org. The NGO Liaison Officer, put in place through ICVA, supported the work of other inter-agency quality and accountability resource people and enabled agencies to make the most of these opportunities. One example was the arrival in country of the Sphere and HAP consultants who, together with the Accountability and Learning Working Group (ALWG), established a national resource team, or Core Support Group, on Quality and Accountability. This was a group of approximately 15 Burmese people nominated by the ALWG and other appropriate agencies, aimed at providing continuing support to their own and other agencies. Despite the challenging context, many agencies made concerted efforts to put accountability to the communities into practice. The outcome of all these attempts remains unclear, but information about the efficacy of various approaches continues to be shared effectively, both at the ALWG and in clusters.

5.6
Funding

In the case of the funding mechanisms (such as ERFs or CHFs), although the fund administrators try to monitor the implementation of NGO projects (but not those of the UN agencies), they are more focused on delivery against a project proposal rather than continuous consultation with beneficiaries. The humanitarian reforms have done little to change existing incentives structures to focus more on how money is spent than on beneficiary perspectives or assessing the impact of reforms on crisis-affected communities.

Donors can support organisations to become accountable and responsive by funding accountability in project budgets, as documented experience has shown that dedicated financial and human resources are required from the onset of a programme. Operational agencies need to ensure the reasons for these costs are clearly explained. It may still be necessary to negotiate with donors the ratio between how much of a humanitarian response budget is invested in emergency inputs, such as relief items or water and sanitation inputs, compared with how much is invested in the process by which the intervention is developed and implemented. However, donor commitment should be a springboard for discussion and the opportunity should not be missed. Budget flexibility is also a must in order to respond fully to feedback from communities.

If donors are to become more responsive to funding accountability, agencies also need to build up their understanding of how to put their accountability commitments into practice in the various emergency contexts within which they work. Agencies will have to better monitor and judge compliance against established accountability benchmarks and standards. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence of 'tick box' exercises that, at best, miss the point and, at worst, exacerbate vulnerability or do harm.

5.7
The role of leadership in improving accountability

Within organisations and at the country level, leadership is, again, key to ensuring better downward accountability. From country directors to cluster leads to HCs, there is much more that can be done in terms of promoting accountability to affected populations. While accountability to donors is essential, it is not enough: the element of accountability to affected populations must be built into the various aspects of humanitarian reform, as well as into individual organisations' procedures. One of the key roles that NGOs can play is to help lead cluster work on improving accountability to affected populations – not only at the global level, but also at the country level – since, to date, much of the leadership on improving accountability has come from the NGO community.

5.8
Ways forward

As part of the research, the mapping studies sought to explore whether and how far accountability to affected communities has been enhanced as a result of the humanitarian reform process and to what extent, if any, reform initiatives have promoted downward accountability. However, the studies could not reach definitive conclusions on the impact of humanitarian reforms on services and accountability to beneficiaries, partly because, in many of those countries, the reform mechanisms are still at an early stage. As the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project moves forward, it will place a strong emphasis on promoting downward accountability and working with other humanitarian actors to enhance downward accountability within the three spokes of the humanitarian reform wheel.

Part 6
Financing

"The reform is a system that increases NGO dependency on the UN through CERF and pooled funds. NGO possibilities for action are diminished"
A donor, Afghanistan mapping study

6.1
Introduction

The financing 'spoke' of the reform chariot wheel originally focused on expanding the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) with a grant element, launched in March 2006, to provide funding for core humanitarian activities in rapid response crises and for under-funded emergencies. CERF grants, as per the UN General Assembly Resolution that established it, can only be provided to UN agencies and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). NGOs can only receive funding from CERF via a UN agency.[40] Other country-based humanitarian pooled fund mechanisms are now commonly seen as part of 'reformed financing' because of their compatible goals: 1) Common Humanitarian Funds (CHFs), which were initially piloted in 2006 in Sudan and DRC to channel funding to agreed humanitarian response plans; and 2) Emergency or Humanitarian Response Funds (ERFs or HRFs), which have existed since the late 1990s.

Four out of the five mapping study countries have some sort of country-based pooled fund and all have received CERF funding. NGO access to these funds in the five countries – particularly for local and national NGOs – continues to have its limitations and drawbacks. The 2008 Stoddard study, which looked at the various humanitarian financing mechanisms and financing streams, showed an increase in overall humanitarian funding with a "faster rate of growth during the past three years during which the new mechanisms were introduced."[41] However, her study also found that an increasing amount of humanitarian funding is being channelled through the UN, with the biggest drop in direct funding to NGOs taking place in 2006 and 2007 when the mechanisms came into place.

The reforms in humanitarian financing illustrate the wider unresolved issue of the UN-centric nature of the reform. The challenges faced by NGOs in accessing these reformed financing mechanisms reinforce the need for donors not to put "all their eggs into one basket."[42] Without complementary funding mechanisms, there is a risk that humanitarian needs will not be met in the most efficient way.[43] The mapping studies indicate that country based pooled funding mechanisms take some time to get established before they can effectively channel funds to frontline agencies, including NGOs. This implies that they may be more effective in chronic crises where humanitarian coordination structures and partnership between NGOs and UN agencies are well established. Stoddard further recommended that donors should not undermine coordination

40 See United National General Assembly Resolution GA/RES/60/124. URL: www.un.org

41 Stoddard, A. (2008). International Humanitarian Financing: Review and comparative assessment of instruments: A study for the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative commissioned by the Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance. London: Humanitarian Outcomes. URL: ochaonline.un.org

42 Stoddard, A. (2008). Ibid.

43 Stoddard, A. (2008). Ibid.

"A UN agency interviewee felt that traditional bilateral donors were disengaging, not only from grant administration but also from more political engagement"
Ethiopia mapping study

goals with bilateral funding, but should instead promote participation in coordination mechanisms. While that has been the case in Sudan, as will be seen, such participation does not necessarily add value beyond simply funding. Strong leaders are required to help ensure a strategic response to humanitarian needs. The mapping studies found that, once again, effective humanitarian leadership can play an important role in ensuring that funding is used strategically to cover humanitarian needs. In DRC, for example, the HC chairs the Pooled Fund Board and provides active leadership, but in other countries, such as Ethiopia, the HC does not play such an active role in a similar board.

The mapping studies also found that it remains unclear what impact the various reformed financing mechanisms are having on improving humanitarian responses to affected populations. There is a lack of consistent monitoring of the use of the funds, and efforts by UN fund managers to explore ways to promote greater downwards accountability to project participants and communities affected by crisis have been limited. The emphasis of humanitarian actors – including INGOs – in the past years has been on how the mechanisms operate and their efficiency at channelling money, rather than the impact of the funding on humanitarian aid delivery.

6.2
Funding in the mapping countries

CERF and country-level pooled funds represent a relatively small proportion of total humanitarian funding to each of the mapping study countries. The table below shows total humanitarian funding (in US$ millions) to each of the mapping study countries in 2008, the country-based pooled funding mechanism in place (Afghanistan is the only country without one), and the amount of funding channelled through the pooled funding mechanism, as well as CERF funding.[44]

44 It should be noted that the Red Cross/ Red Crescent Movement does not apply to these mechanisms for funding. It is possible for the mechanisms to finance national Red Cross or Red Crescent societies but, to date, in the countries examined here, no funding has gone to the national societies.

"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 ECHO and OFDA"
Ethiopia mapping study

Figure 3
Country-based pooled funding and CERF funding to five mapping study countries as percentages of total humanitarian funding in 2008

Country	Total 2008 humanitarian funding (US$ millions)	Country-level pooled funding mechanism	Pooled funding in 2008 (US$ millions)	Pooled funding as % of humanitarian funding	CERF funding in 2008 (US$ millions)	CERF as % of humanitarian funding
Afghanistan	548	—	—	—	18	3%
DRC	656	Pooled fund (includes support to Emergency Response Fund & Rapid Response Mechanism)	142	21%	41	6%
Ethiopia	974	Humanitarian Response Fund	68	8%	32	3%
Sudan	1728	Common Humanitarian Fund – includes support to Emergency Response Fund	154	9%	16	1%
Zimbabwe	468	Emergency Response Fund	2	< 0.5%	11	2%

The limited amount of money going through the reformed financing mechanisms shows that in specific crises, bilateral funding "continues to represent by far the largest share (roughly 80 percent) of contributions."[45] The reasons for pooled funds making up only a small proportion of total humanitarian funding will vary across countries, but one major factor is that the two largest humanitarian donors – the US and EC – do not channel their funding through such mechanisms (and the EC does not contribute to the CERF either). The fund managers in Sudan, Ethiopia and DRC, therefore, make a concerted effort to coordinate funding with the largest bilateral donors, particularly the USA and the EC. The pooled mechanisms in DRC, Ethiopia and Sudan all make information about funding decisions, and how money has been spent, public through their websites, which makes funding decisions more transparent than those of many bilateral donors. Funding from CERF is also posted on the CERF website, which lists the recipient agency, project title, sector, funding amounts and disbursement date for each grant[46] making the allocations awarded to each UN agency and the IOM transparent, but not the ultimate use of the funds or how much funding is passed through to NGOs.

No matter how bilateral donors channel their funding in a given context, it is important that they inform the HC about these decisions to facilitate coordination. The mapping studies show that although the US has sought to communicate and coordinate its decisions by taking a place on the pooled fund boards, most donors do not actively participate on the advisory boards. Such donor participation may raise questions of appropriateness (given the potential implications on humanitarian principles, such as independence), but it does, at least, show a commitment to some level of coordination with the pooled funds.

45 Stoddard, A. (2008). Ibid (see footnote 41).

46 www.cerf.org

6.3 CERF

"Many NGOs view CERF as the UN's 'private funds'"
Afghanistan mapping study

From 2006 to 2008, the five mapping study countries accounted for 27–45 percent of total CERF allocations, with DRC receiving the largest amount of CERF funding in each of those years. CERF funding is highly concentrated in terms of recipient agencies, with WFP, UNICEF and UNHCR receiving approximately 65–75 percent of total CERF funding between 2006 and 2008. Since most UN agencies rely on implementing partners, CERF funding is often passed through to NGOs. Currently, however, NGOs do not rely on the CERF for front line aid delivery as its disbursement is simply too slow. This slowness is also partly due to the fact that the standard partnership agreements UN agencies use to provide funding to NGOs (CERF money and others) are not designed to channel funding quickly. The agreements are highly variable and often require negotiations, particularly for support costs, on a country-by-country or project-by-project basis, thus slowing down the process and increasing transaction costs for NGOs.

This report is unable to analyse the volumes of CERF funding to NGOs (or its timeliness) as there is no published record of onward funding from the UN agencies to NGOs in the mapping countries (except in DRC where the Pooled Fund unit asks UN agencies to detail CERF funding to international and Congolese NGOs, government authorities, and private contractors). NGOs rarely know if funding from UN agencies comes from the CERF or other sources. It should be relatively straightforward to track a substantial portion of CERF funding if WFP, UNICEF, and UNHCR are willing to make the information available, which should be feasible, since they do so in DRC. Such data would be a first step in trying to assess the impact of the CERF on humanitarian aid delivery, which the 2008 CERF evaluation tried to do, although its conclusions mainly related to CERF's impact on a more global response level.

NGOs report that CERF decision-making and the speed of financial disbursements have improved in recent months. In part, some of the improvements made have been thanks to the leadership of individuals within the CERF Secretariat who, over the years, have tried to facilitate changes. The CERF Secretariat, however, only has limited influence in getting UN agencies to change their practices. Whilst the CERF Secretariat may have become more agile in improving the timeliness of funding to eligible grant recipients, it still takes far too long for NGOs to receive the funding from UN agencies, which is primarily where the bottleneck still exists. For example, one INGO waited eight months, from May 2008 to January 2009, for approval for funding in Chad, but was then only permitted to backdate the funds by two months, leaving a considerable gap in the programme budget.[47]

Without an effective way to fund operational NGOs, the CERF will never be the rapid response mechanism it was intended to be. Many UN agencies use internal emergency reserves or re-programme existing funds to respond to sudden onset emergencies in order to cover the time between CERF funding approval and disbursement. It may be possible for some larger INGOs to do

47 Enhancing Humanitarian Partnerships: An NGO paper presented to the Montreux GHD meeting, March 2009. URL: www.goodhumanitariandonorship.org

"NGO interviewees commented that not all parts of the humanitarian sector have access to Common Humanitarian Funds and the CERF, and that it was an open question as to whether these mechanisms did lead to better service for the affected population"
Sudan mapping study

something similar, but for smaller international and national NGOs, which lack substantial emergency reserve funds, this method is simply not feasible and the system as it currently operates effectively blocks them from accessing CERF funds through UN agencies because they cannot spend their own funds upfront and wait for CERF funds to reimburse them at a later date. One possible avenue for NGOs to explore is to look at IOM, as it can receive and disburse CERF funds like UN agencies, but IOM tends to have systems that are quicker than those of UN agencies and there have been examples of CERF funding being passed through IOM to NGOs, which seem to have worked well.

6.4
Using pooled funds strategically

As country-based mechanisms, pooled funds have the potential to help ensure that funding is allocated in a more strategic manner so as to meet needs, unlike much funding that is decided upon in distant donor capitals. However, the reality is very mixed, with the level of prioritisation being highly dependent on the coordination and objective setting, which takes place either through the clusters or the CAPs/Humanitarian Action Plan[48] processes.

Another complicating factor is the complexity of some allocation procedures, with the result that the process of setting priorities and selecting projects is not very transparent. So, for example, whilst the WASH cluster in DRC has been good at setting criteria for prioritising activities for funding, the same is not true elsewhere. Once again, leadership in these processes plays a pivotal role in ensuring a strategic response and finding ways to assess the impact on populations.

In Sudan, for example, while NGO participation in the Work Plan[49] is quite strong, some NGOs pointed out that the Work Plan was just a mixed bag of projects rather than a strategic plan and that they were only involved in the process because it was a prerequisite for getting funding.[50] However, simply being involved in a coordination mechanism does not guarantee strategic humanitarian responses. The mapping study found that while the allocation of pooled funds to the eight planning regions is strategic, and allocation envelopes are decided centrally, beyond that the sectors then allocate them to individual projects. Interviewees used a variety of terms to describe the latter parts of the allocation process including: horse-trading; cake-sharing; a market; a souk; a bazaar; animals at a trough pushing each other aside, because the discussion at the allocation meetings is not about strategy or priorities, but about percentages and amounts. Several interviewees pointed out that this competition for funding, coupled with the perception that some sector leads are abusing their position to give priority to funding their own programmes, is promoting discord rather than coordination in some sectors. The quality of this process varies amongst the clusters/sectors and, at a wider level, points to the need to strengthen cluster structures and leadership to create an enabling environment for a strategic allocation process. Furthermore, without strong leadership, coordination mechanisms cannot necessarily ensure that funds are used strategically to meet priority humanitarian needs.

48 In DRC, the Humanitarian Action Plan is the agreed plan for humanitarian response.

49 The Sudan Work Plan is the equivalent of the Consolidated Appeals Process in other countries.

50 In order to qualify for funding from the CHF, NGOs in Sudan have to participate in the Work Plan.

6.5
Country-based pooled fund advisory boards

One way in which NGOs could have an influence over the strategic use of country based pooled funds is through the advisory boards for the funds. INGOs participate in these boards in four of the mapping countries. The Ethiopia Review Board allocates CERF as well as HRF funding, which potentially gives them a voice in establishing the policies and procedures for country based funds and field-level decision-making for CERF country allocations. In Sudan and DRC, local NGOs are not represented on the CHF/Pooled Fund Boards, but the HRF and ERF in Ethiopia and Zimbabwe respectively have allowed local NGOs to join the Advisory Board. In Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Red Cross is the local "NGO" representative, and in Zimbabwe, there are two NGO representatives on the five-person board: one international NGO and one national NGO.

However, the question must be asked: how far can NGOs successfully influence the pooled funds to be more strategic? If, in Sudan, INGOs are on the advisory board but still they report that the disbursement from clusters is not sufficiently strategic past the regional level, do NGOs have any influence for change within the system? Or is the combination of complicated allocation processes and difficult operating contexts too challenging for the boards to overcome?

Differences in ERF/CHF management

ERFs are generally better regarded by NGOs than CHFs, primarily because ERFs are managed by OCHA, whose procedures are better adapted to humanitarian contexts, and perhaps also because the ERFs mainly fund NGOs. ERF administrative procedures for decision-making and their speed of fund disbursement are quicker and more agile than those of CHFs, which are managed by UNDP. UNDP's slow, development-oriented, more cumbersome financial management processes do not sit easily with the speed vital for effective humanitarian response. ERFs tend to be smaller, gap-filling funds that respond to unforeseen crises not included in a strategic plan through applications on a rolling basis. Findings from the mapping studies indicate that allocation procedures for the CHFs in Sudan and DRC can be slow, partly because they are setting priorities during defined points in the year, in order to finance on-going needs included in the Work Plan/Humanitarian Action Plan. The establishment of a new Funding Coordination Office within OCHA in 2009 will hopefully bring improvements to country-based pooled funds, making the CHFs more agile in their response.

6.6
Allocations from Pooled Funds

The mapping studies have found that the percentage of CHF/ERF funds going to NGOs (both international and national/local) varies across countries. The funds tend to benefit the larger NGOs that have the resources to participate in the allocation processes and to comply with the administrative requirements. One of the greatest potential benefits of country-level pooled funds is the access to funding for local and national NGOs. However, as the mapping studies have shown, LNGOs and NNGOs have very limited access to these funds, when compared to INGOs or UN agencies. Perhaps one of the most concerning findings of the Stoddard study was that: "Local NGO participation and capacity building for indigenous humanitarian response continue to receive lip service, but have not been seen to benefit in any significant way by the new mechanisms

"In Zimbabwe, DfID decided not to put more money into the UN. The ERF is seen as too slow compared to direct funding"
Zimbabwe mapping study

to date, or show much promise of future benefits from the financing system as it is currently configured."[51] The mapping studies have largely reinforced this finding.

Sudan

Although some NGOs refuse to participate in the Sudan Work Plan or CHF processes because they consider that doing so would compromise their independence, NGO participation in the Work Plan has increased from 70 INGOs in 2006 to 98 in 2009 and from 20 NNGOs in 2006 to 45 in 2009. Concomitant with this increase, INGOs have doubled their share of CHF funding in Sudan between 2006 (15.2 percent) and 2008 (32.4 percent), although national/local NGOs continue to get very little funding (1.5 percent of the CHF in 2008).

There is also increasing frustration with the CHF in Sudan because small and large grant applications require almost the same amount of work. Efforts to make the allocation process fairer have resulted in increased transaction costs for accessing the CHF and meeting the project requirements. The mapping study found that INGOs might reduce their engagement with the CHF if it continues to be perceived as providing diminishing returns. The complex application procedure also places a huge administrative burden on Sudanese NGOs.

DRC

By contrast, the mapping study showed that INGOs are choosing to actively engage with the CHF in DRC. Both international and Congolese NGOs in DRC have increased their share of the CHF each year since 2006, with INGOs going from 22.48 percent to 42.40 percent (from 2006 to 2008) and Congolese NGOs' share going from 3.95 percent to 5.81 percent (from 2006 to 2008). NGOs' main concern was UNDP's administrative requirements, which include a time-consuming capacity assessment of NGOs, and a lack of understanding about operational realities in the field. Even large INGOs that receive substantial bilateral funding may be regarded as 'high risk' by UNDP if they have not previously received a Pooled Fund grant. UNDP's audit rules can also be cumbersome, particularly for Congolese NGOs: each CHF grant is audited separately and costs US$5,400 each. In 2008, the total CHF audit costs were US$700,000.

51 Stoddard, A. (2008). Ibid (see footnote 41)

"The Pooled Fund is administered by bureaucrats who do not have the programming experience to understand what the bureaucracy translates into in terms of on-the-ground programming."
INGO representative, DRC mapping study

Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, the HRF received US$13-15 million in donor contributions in 2006 and 2007, but this increased substantially to US$68 million in 2008. INGOs have received over half of total HRF funding in each year (almost 75 percent in 2007). According to HRF guidelines, "pre-qualified NGOs, accredited by the Government and vetted by the Review Board, are entitled to submit proposals". While this clause implies that Ethiopian and INGOs are equally eligible for funding, the Review Board had only funded Ethiopian NGOs through international partners at the time of the mapping study. INGOs were generally very positive about the HRF, seeing it as a quick and responsive mechanism, although some pointed out that UN projects are not scrutinised as rigorously as NGO projects, leading to questions about how well the Principles of Partnership are applied in this context.

Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe (according to funding data available from OCHA), the ERF received US$1.3 million from Norway in 2007 and contributions of US$2.5 million from Norway, Denmark, Ireland and Switzerland in 2008. OCHA did not provide expenditure data for 2007, but in 2008, 78 percent of funding went to international and Zimbabwean NGOs. Interviewees highlighted a number of challenges with this ERF, including: the two-week application deadline; the lack of an explanation for rejections; and the variable quality of proposals (with Zimbabwean NGOs submitting weaker proposals). Some NGOs expressed a reluctance to apply to the ERF because it did not finance NGO overhead costs, though it did cover UN agency overheads. The HC finally addressed this concern in the last week of January 2009 by stating that all ERF applicants are entitled to overheads.

Effective partnerships

As NGOs increasingly have to turn to UN agencies to access funding for humanitarian response, it is essential that UN-NGO funding partnerships are appropriate for their purpose, enabling NGOs to deliver predictable, timely and cost-efficient responses to crisis-affected communities. Whilst there is still a lot of work to be done, recent initiatives by several UN agencies, in conjunction with partner NGOs, to develop common operational frameworks for transferring funds to NGOs is a welcome development that could be the catalyst for a more partnership-based approach to UN relations with non-UN agencies.

One of the weaknesses of the pooled funds is that it is difficult to assess their added value for crisis-affected populations because there is no consistent monitoring and evaluation of this. In some places, efforts are made, as in Ethiopia, where the HRF team tries to visit each funded project at least once. In recognition of this overall weakness of the pooled funds, a generic monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment strategy and methodology is being developed.[52]

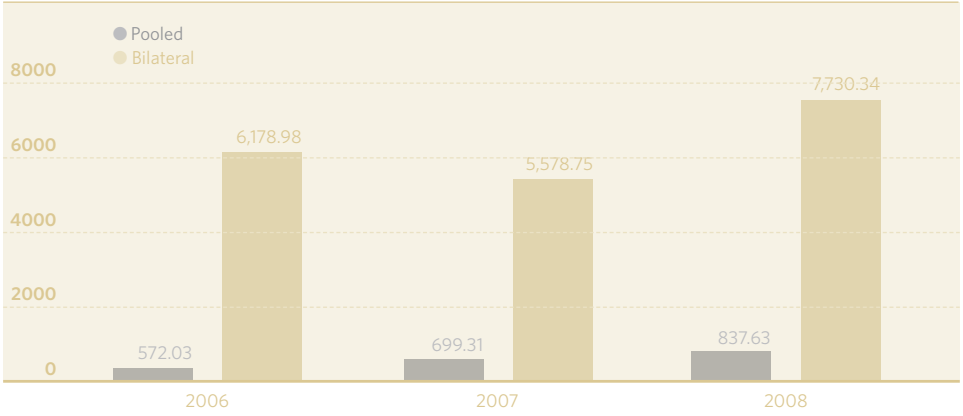
52 Oxfam International, (May 2009), Oxfam Briefing Note: Making Pooled Funding Work for People in Crisis. URL: www.oxfam.org

6.7
Implications of humanitarian reform for bilateral funding

One of the common characteristics of these humanitarian funding mechanisms is that they are overwhelmingly UN-centric. The mapping studies and wider experience present a mixed picture in terms of the consequences of reformed UN funding mechanisms for bilateral funding, leaving it a key issue to follow during the course of the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project. It is not the absolute volume of money flowing through these pooled funding mechanisms that particularly concerns INGOs and UN agencies, but the fact that the money is coming from donors that they generally regard as flexible and responsive. These donors have a reduced capacity to manage bilateral funding and are increasingly turning to pooled funds as a convenient channel and thereby, delegating fund management responsibilities. The most consistent donors to the CHFs and ERFs are Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the UK.

Figure 4

Bilateral vs. pooled humanitarian funding: 2006–2008



All figures in US$ millions. Shows bilateral funding from DAC donors and funding channelled through pooled humanitarian mechanisms (i.e. the CERF, CHFs and ERFs). This table reveals that overall contributions to these instruments are very small compared to overall bilateral funding (between 9–12 percent of the amounts given bilaterally). The graph also demonstrates that although bilateral funding decreased slightly between 2006 and 2007, it rose significantly in 2008, by US$2 billion. This rise is due mainly to increased funding from the USA and EC (totalling an increase of US$1.7 billion).

One obvious concern is that other donors will choose to channel funding through UN mechanisms – whether through clusters or pooled funds – not on the basis of effective reform, but rather driven by bureaucratic pressure to cut or devolve administrative costs. Were the US or EC to change their policy and channel assistance through the UN pooled funds, it would have a significant impact on direct bilateral funding. The election of the Obama administration in the US has led many to see an opportunity for a reform of US aid policy. Such reform could be informed by the wider UN reforms, and by other bilateral donors, but there are concerns about the potential impact of any such changes. If UN humanitarian funding were channelled rapidly and effectively to frontline programmes, such a shift might not be problematic. However, in contexts where the UN system is slow or otherwise ineffective, such a shift could undermine the humanitarian response, as happened following Bangladesh's Cyclone Sidr in November 2007, when DfID sought to fund the response through UN agencies until the delays caused it to switch tactics and channel funding directly through NGOs. Similarly, the Pakistan IDP crisis in the Swat Valley in mid-2009 saw significant amounts of funding being channelled through some clusters at

the beginning of the response, with the result that meetings were more about allocating funding than coordinating humanitarian response. The Swat Valley example highlights the outstanding question about what role clusters should play in allocating funding – are they meant to be coordination mechanisms or should they also play a role in allocating funding? Given the various experiences where cluster leads have been perceived as prioritising their own agency's projects when considering funding allocations, instead of prioritising on the basis of need, the impartiality of cluster leads can be questioned.

6.8
Ways forward

The various funding mechanisms provide different opportunities to respond to humanitarian needs. Moving towards more flexible, timely and adequate humanitarian funding requires strong and effective humanitarian leadership to ensure coordination and gap-filling. Donors, UN agencies and NGOs must work together in a transparent manner to ensure that reformed humanitarian funding mechanisms and bilateral funding can complement each other to the benefit of crisis-affected communities.

The role of clusters in allocating funding, as noted above, remains an unclear one that requires clarification. There is an urgent need to find ways in which to 'firewall' cluster lead responsibilities from the perception – if not reality – of cluster leads prioritising their own agency projects when it comes to allocating funds.

Making funding dependent on participation in coordination or planning mechanisms is one way of promoting coordination, but such participation does not necessarily guarantee a strategic approach to humanitarian response nor does it ensure a process based on genuine partnership. While HCs and/or donors may be tempted to force participation in coordination mechanisms, unless those mechanisms are being led by the right people, with the relevant humanitarian experience, the exercise is more a matter of surface than substance.

Donors can, and should, play a stronger role, particularly at the field level, to ensure that greater support for the various funding mechanisms is provided – not only in terms of leadership from the HC or cluster leads, but also in terms of ensuring coordination between the various mechanisms. In addition, they should be facilitating means for local and national NGOs to access the country-level pooled funds if they are serious about following through on the Good Humanitarian Donorship principle of supporting local capacities.[53] Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there is a need for humanitarian actors to look beyond the funding available to them and work towards finding ways to assess and monitor the impact of reformed humanitarian financing mechanisms on affected populations. After all, the motivation for installing such mechanisms should be the speedier availability of funds so as to better meet the humanitarian needs of affected populations.

53 Principle 8, *Principles of Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship*, 17 June 2003. www.goodhumanitariandonorship.org/background.asp

Part 7
Conclusion

"Although there are some bright spots, the humanitarian reform process as a whole is still not working as originally intended"

The overall conclusion of the findings of the five country mapping studies is that although there are some bright spots, the humanitarian reform process as a whole is still not working as originally intended. Different aspects of the reform have been partially implemented in the five countries in different ways. However, a critical problem is that, in four out of the five countries, strong humanitarian leadership has been lacking. The United Nations has continued to appoint Humanitarian Coordinators who have insufficient experience of humanitarian action and who lack the understanding that would allow them to cooperate effectively with NGOs. As a result, opportunities to build useful partnerships and to fund humanitarian response in a strategic manner are being lost.

Too little emphasis has been placed on the essential element of leadership in the humanitarian reform process to date, which has had a direct impact on NGO engagement. There is a need to ensure that stronger, more effective leaders with humanitarian experience are appointed to the pivotal HC position, as well as to lead clusters, particularly at the country level. A lack of effective leadership has a negative impact on other elements of the reform process – such as coordination, funding and partnership.

The mapping studies have also highlighted a number of outstanding questions and challenges related to the humanitarian reform that need to be addressed. Although many of these are not new, the mapping studies have brought together fresh evidence. Some of these challenges – such as the impact of leadership and coordination on humanitarian access and the ability of agencies to operate in a principled fashion – have received inadequate consideration in policy discussions on reform thus far.

There is a need to make the cluster approach more effective so that it adds value to the humanitarian response in an efficient manner that ensures accountability to affected populations. Cluster leads also need to make certain that all participants are treated as genuine partners, raising the question of how better to involve local and national NGOs. Clearly, cluster leads have a role to play in supporting local and national NGOs, but their participation should also be facilitated by their international NGO partners. When it comes to the relationship between clusters and funding – not only pooled funds, but also bilateral funding – there are still questions about what role (if any) clusters should play in allocating funding. In some clusters, funding responsibilities may sit well, but in other situations they may give rise to a perception that priority is given to the lead agency's projects. There is also the very real risk that giving clusters funding responsibilities would lead to meeting agendas dominated by funding decisions instead of the humanitarian response.

The role that NGOs can play in co-leading (or co-facilitating or even co-chairing) clusters must be clarified. While attempts are underway at the global level, the varying practices in different countries will have to be taken into consideration and flexibility will need to be built into any global decisions about the role.

The added responsibility that co-leadership entails is accompanied by the need for funding to enable the NGO to fulfil that role. The role of donors in supporting NGOs to be co-leads is essential. Without such additional support, most NGOs do not have the resources to dedicate to co-leadership responsibilities. Donors should also find ways to better support the role of local and national NGOs in the reform processes. One of the greatest potential strengths of the pooled funds, for example, is that national and local NGOs can access them, but often bureaucratic procedures act as an obstacle. How can donors help to ensure that LNGOs and NNGOs are empowered to better access pooled funds at the country level?

Looking ahead

The mapping studies have shown that all the different elements of the reform are interlinked, but that there is still some way to go to ensure that appropriate priority is given to all parts of the chariot wheel of reform. The challenges facing the reform must be addressed by all those whom it affects.

During the course of the next two years, the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project will seek to address many of these issues, both through identifying practical solutions and advocating for necessary changes by appropriate actors for the benefit of populations with whom we work.

— By placing Humanitarian Reform Officers in Afghanistan, DRC, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe to engage the wider community of national and international NGOs, the Project will work to identify good practices that can be replicated in other countries.
— In addition, through advocacy at the global level, the Project will work on instigating broader improvements in the various elements of the reform process.
— Where it is possible we will test the hypothesis that strong humanitarian leadership makes a difference to crisis-affected communities.
— We will also work on developing closer collaboration on sharing needs assessment frameworks, which are essential to having a more accurate understanding of humanitarian needs.
— Finally, the Project will gauge experiences of what mechanisms and forums provide the NGO community with the most effective ways to coordinate humanitarian response, in the hopes that those lessons will help to ensure better humanitarian outcomes for affected populations.

The Project will look for ways to improve the different elements of the humanitarian reform process. However, if the work of the Project over the coming years finds that certain elements cannot be fixed as the reform is currently configured, we will also not shy away from making recommendations for change. After all, the point of any reform of humanitarian action should be to provide more effective humanitarian outcomes, and we will make sure it is this goal that guides the Project's work.

Acronyms

Term	Meaning
ACF	Action Contre La Faim
ALWG	Accountability and Learning Working Group
CAFOD	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
CAP	Consolidated Appeals Process
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund (since 9 March 2006; previously the Central Emergency Revolving Fund)
DfID	The United Kingdom's Department for International Development
DHC	Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator
DSRSG	Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General
EC	European Commission
ECHA	UN's Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs
ECHO	The Humanitarian Office of the European Commission
ERC	Emergency Relief Coordinator (the head of OCHA)
GHP	Global Humanitarian Platform
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
IA-RTE	Inter-Agency Real-Time Evaluation
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IOM	International Organization for Migration (an inter-governmental organisation)
IRC	International Rescue Committee
LNGO	Local Non-Governmental Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NNGO	National Non-Governmental Organisation
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
POLR	Provider Of Last Resort
RC	Resident Coordinator
RC/HC	Double-hatted Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator
RTE	Real-Time Evaluation
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCHA	See OCHA
US$	United States Dollars
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme

Authorship

This report is based on five country studies – Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Zimbabwe – conducted by Tasneem Mowjee of Development Initiatives, Antonio Donini of Feinstein International Center, and Ralf Otto and John Cosgrave of Channel Research.

The writing of this report was overseen by the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project Manager, Anne Street. Extensive inputs were provided by Aimee Ansari, Kitty Arie, John Cosgrave, Tasneem Mowjee, Howard Mollett, Clare Smith, Manisha Thomas and Dan Tyler. The project consortium also wishes to acknowledge the contributions from: Nicki Bennett, Suzi Faye, Massimo Fusato, Yasmin McDonnell, Ed Schenkenberg van Mierop, Bethan Montague-Brown, Mike Noyes, Adam Poulter, Janet Puhalovic, Unnikrishnan PV and Bijay Kumar. The views expressed in this report and the policy recommendations presented represent the consolidated position of the consortium member agencies of the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project.*

Methodology

The following methodology was used for the research and writing of the five mapping studies commissioned by the project and carried out by independent consultants in Afghanistan, DRC, Ethiopia, Sudan and Zimbabwe between November 2008 and February 2009.

All consultants met with a range of stakeholders including UN staff, international and national NGO staff, donors and national government officials. Participatory interviews were held with crisis-affected communities in all countries except Sudan where security considerations prevented a trip to Darfur from taking place. Interviews were semi-structured with audio or note taking records made of discussions. Feedback workshops/meetings were held in all five countries to present initial findings to interviewees. Desk research and interviews with HQ staff were also conducted. For the Afghanistan study 60 interviewees were consulted and four focus groups were held, three during a field visit to Jalalabad and one in Shomali. In DRC, 30 interviews and meetings were conducted. In addition, a visit to Goma included participatory group interviews in three IDP camps. In Ethiopia, 39 interviews were conducted including group interviews with three crisis affected-communities in two drought-affected areas, Awassa and Shinile. In Sudan, a perceptions questionnaire based on a five point Likert survey was circulated to stakeholders and given to interviewees following the interview with the consultant. 45 responses were received. In Zimbabwe, 91 interviewees were consulted and two field visits took place to Masvingo and Binga; in both places the consultant conducted interviews with crisis-affected communities.

*The report and the policy recommendations presented do not, however, reflect the views of all ICVA members.

October 2009

Design: williamjoseph.co.uk

The NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project **aims to strengthen the effective engagement of local, national and international humanitarian NGOs in reformed humanitarian financing and coordination mechanisms at global and country levels. The project, which is funded by DfID, aims to fortify the voices of NGOs in influencing policy debates and field processes related to humanitarian reform and to propose solutions so that humanitarian response can better meet the needs of affected populations. A consortium of six NGOs are part of the project – ActionAid, CAFOD, CARE, International Rescue Committee, Oxfam and Save the Children, together with the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA). The project runs for three years until October 2011.**

For further information contact annie.street@actionaid.org or visit the project website on http://www.icva.ch/ngosandhumanitarianreform.html

ActionAid International
Postnet Suite 248
Private bag X31
Saxonwold 2132
Johannesburg
South Africa

CAFOD
Romero Close
Stockwell Road
London
SW9 9TY
United Kingdom

Care International UK
10–13 Rushworth Street
London
SE1 0RB
United Kingdom

International Council of Voluntary Agencies
26–28 avenue Giuseppe-Motta
1202 Geneva
Switzerland

IRC – UK
11 Gower Street
London
WC1E 6HB
United Kingdom

Oxfam GB
Oxfam House
John Smith Drive
Oxford
OX4 2JY
United Kingdom

Save the Children UK
1 St John's Lane
London
EC1M 4AR
United Kingdom