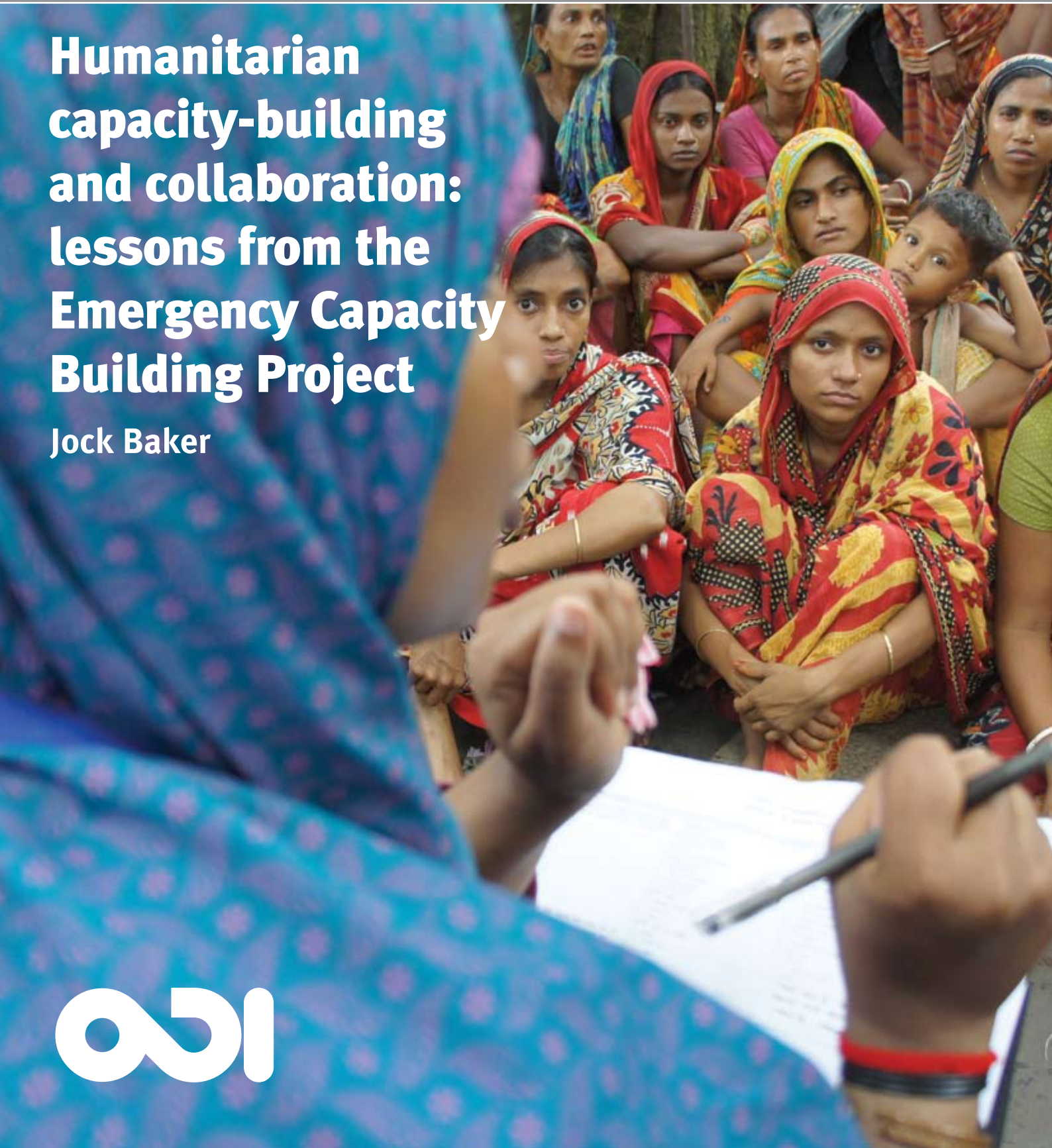


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Humanitarian capacity-building and collaboration: lessons from the Emergency Capacity Building Project

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Cover photo: A needs assessment in Shatkira District, Bangladesh.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

When the Emergency Capacity Building (ECB) Project was being designed just over a decade ago, humanitarian agencies faced several significant challenges. Disasters were increasing in frequency, severity and complexity, stretching the response capacities of the global humanitarian system. At the same time, standards for humanitarian response were becoming increasingly rigorous, resulting in increased pressure on agencies to demonstrate accountability and the impact of the assistance they were providing.

One of the findings of the 2005 *Humanitarian Response Review*, commissioned by the UN Emergency Response Coordinator, Jan Egeland, was that, while links and collaboration between humanitarian actors were limited, it was essential for the humanitarian community to work collectively towards an inclusive system-wide coordination mechanism. Other observers expressed concern that NGOs were increasingly being forced to compete over limited resources and 'market share'.

Competition was seen as discouraging collaboration and the sharing of information and learning. With the overall goal of improving the speed, quality and effectiveness of emergency preparedness and response, the ECB Project aimed to build capacity by encouraging collaboration, particularly at a country level.

This paper documents key milestones and synthesises the main lessons from the initial design phase in 2003–2004 up to the end of the project in 2013. In addition to contributing to learning about collaboration between humanitarian agencies, it is hoped that some of the tools and guidelines developed during the life of the project can be of use to others. The paper begins with a chronology of the ECB Project, to help understand how it came about. This is followed by a description of the objectives of the project, how it was influenced, what its objectives were and its major achievements and challenges. It concludes with key lessons about collaboration between humanitarian agencies.

Chapter 2

Humanitarian collaboration and communities of practice

The ECB Project traces its roots back to early 2003, when humanitarian directors representing seven of the world's largest international non-governmental organisations assembled for a two-day retreat.¹ The aim was to identify areas where inter-agency collaboration could improve global emergency response, and the obstacles and challenges that humanitarian agencies faced when responding to the needs of disaster-affected people. This group, which subsequently became known as the Interagency Working Group (IWG) Principals, quickly realised that their agencies shared many common challenges. Four themes in particular stood out: staff capacity, accountability to people affected by disasters, community-based disaster risk reduction (DRR) and the role of Information, Communications and Technology (ICT) in humanitarian operations.

A key agenda item when the IWG Principals gathered at their next meeting in late 2003 was to validate their original assumptions. External participants from Tufts University, the Fritz Institute and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation were invited to challenge assumptions, test concepts and develop possible solutions. Although the four themes identified at the initial meeting were validated, it was clear that more work was needed before they could be translated into a viable capacity-building initiative. A consultant was commissioned to carry out a study analysing the four themes in more detail, and looking more specifically at the constraints to the delivery of timely, effective and high-quality preparedness and response to emergencies, in particular:

- How could well-trained staff be more effectively deployed following a disaster?
- How could agencies be more accountable to disaster-affected communities and better demonstrate the impact of their humanitarian work?
- How should agencies work with communities to identify and reduce their vulnerabilities to disasters and coordinate on DRR issues?
- What is the potential role of ICT in supporting humanitarian operations?

In addition to the ECB Project there have been several other attempts to improve humanitarian responses through interagency collaboration, including the UN-led Humanitarian Reform process and the Transformative Agenda, as well as NGO-initiated efforts such as the UK-based Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) and the Start Network (previously the Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies (CBHA)). One question that the IWG Principals periodically asked was whether they were duplicating the work of these other networks. The main

¹ The seven agencies were CARE International, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Mercy Corps, Oxfam GB, Save the Children and World Vision International (WVI).

reasons why the IWG Principals felt justified in continuing the collaboration included the realisation that they shared challenges, objectives and ways of working, and that the ECB Project offered a way of effectively sharing useful learning between their agencies as well as with the broader humanitarian sector. There was also a shared interest in capacity-building, not only within their own agencies but also for their partners (a number of agencies were moving away from direct implementation to working with local partners). There was also a sense that, as global interagency initiatives were focusing at the policy level, the ECB Project was an opportunity to address the operational challenges facing field staff. Unlike other interagency networks, the ECB Project was not a standard-setting body, but was primarily envisaged as a vehicle to put existing agency and interagency standards into practice using a combination of capacity-building, field-testing and learning (which could be fed back to the relevant interagency networks). Finally, the IWG Principals recognised that being accountable to people affected by disasters needed to take precedence over interagency competition, and that working together could help them meet their commitments more effectively.

A community of practice approach was envisaged for the project from the outset. Etienne Wenger, a leader in the theory of communities of practice, defines them as 'groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly'.² Communities of practice demonstrate three common characteristics:

1. Members share a particular area of common interest.
2. They build relationships so as to learn from each other by sharing information, helping each other and working on joint projects.
3. They have a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools and ways of addressing recurring problems.

The management structure also needed to be considered in the project design. Each agency had equal status and staff recruited specifically for the ECB project were expected to primarily be facilitators, rather than managers. The IWG Principals emphasised building trust and cooperation and decentralised field-driven processes.

Phase 1 of the project was launched in early 2005 for a two-year duration. After a period spent reviewing and redesigning the project and negotiating with the donor, Phase 2 began in 2008, with a five-year timeframe. Although the project design in Phase 2 changed in a number of ways, the goals for both phases remained the same: to improve the speed,

² Etienne Wenger, 'Communities of Practice: A Brief Introduction', 2006, <http://wenger-trayner.com/theory>.

quality and effectiveness of humanitarian response in order to save lives and improve the welfare and protect the rights of people in emergency situations.

The ECB Project was launched just as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) humanitarian reform process was getting under way, and participating agencies were well-positioned to engage with and influence humanitarian reform, particularly at an operational level. Indeed, the 2005 *Humanitarian Response Review* cited the approach as a good practice model for collaboration:

It is increasingly recognized that the process of integrating activities within and between organizations is an important key to a better utilization of available capacity and resources. Central to such an evolution is the willingness of the organizations to look beyond individual capacities and further develop cooperative arrangements among themselves. An example is the NGO Interagency Working Group (IWG), which is committed to the mutually supportive expansion of the emergency capabilities of its members.³

An independent evaluation carried out at the end of Phase 1 of the ECB Project found that most project objectives had been met in terms of contributing to enhanced emergency response capacity in the participating agencies, and that the project had demonstrated its potential to help improve response capacity in the broader humanitarian community.⁴

Phase 2 of the project had three objectives:

Objective 1: To improve field-level capacity to prepare for and respond to emergencies in disaster-prone countries. In Phase 2, field-based consortia were invited to engage in a competitive call for proposals, after which five out of 21 applications were selected based on the quality of the proposal, regional balance, language and other criteria. The five pilots were Bolivia, Niger, Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Horn of Africa. The consortia were open to the ECB agencies, other agencies, local partners, research institutions, communities and governments. Proposed activities included the preparation of national staff development programmes, joint contingency plans, joint needs assessments, interagency accountability training and joint evaluations. Country Engagement Plans (CEPs) were developed to help increase country-level capacity in staffing, accountability, DRR, coordination and local and national government policies, and to share learning.

Objective 2: To increase the speed, quality and effectiveness of emergency preparedness and response mechanisms

within and across IWG agencies. Six participating agencies developed Agency Performance Improvement Plans (APIPs) to increase agency-level capacity in staffing, accountability, DRR, leadership, policies, planning, resource allocation and participatory approaches, and to share learning.

Objective 3: To contribute to improving the sector's emergency preparedness and response through collective dialogue, knowledge sharing, learning and collaborative work with other partners and organisations. The ECB Project worked with partners including the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP), the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), LINGOs (a not-for-profit capacity-building organisation), NetHope, People In Aid and Sphere on field-relevant projects to address gaps in the sector.

Three of the four theme areas identified at the initial Principals' meeting – staff capacity, accountability and impact measurement and DRR – were continued into Phase 2. During Phase 1, the fourth thematic area, Information, Communications and Technology, was carried out in partnership with NetHope, an information technology consortium of 18 international NGOs. This area was dropped as a specific theme in Phase 2 as it was anticipated that continued collaboration with NetHope would make a separate thematic group unnecessary. However, this engagement did not materialise, although networks established during Phase 1 did later result in support being provided to individual agencies. As in Phase 1, Advisory Groups were formed with focal points from each agency for the three other theme areas. However, in Phase 2 these thematic groups played supporting roles and resources were instead allocated to building response capacities in disaster-prone countries, within participating agencies and in the broader humanitarian sector. The major change during Phase 2 was thus a shift from a global to a field-driven approach.

Each country consortium was led by an ECB Project agency, and other agencies, including national NGOs, government institutions, peer INGOs and UN agencies, were free to join the consortia either as members or observers. While objectives were established when the project was designed, implementation was heavily influenced by a number of factors ranging from related interagency processes (such as humanitarian reform), agency restructuring processes and disaster events, which forced some activities to be put on hold while at the same time offering opportunities to put learning and guidance into practice. Key milestones for the ECB Project can thus be divided into three categories: internal project processes, external processes and disaster events.

³ C. Adinolfi et al., *Humanitarian Response Review*, OCHA, 2005, p. 29.

⁴ M. F. Morris and D. Shaughnessy, *Final Evaluation Report: Emergency Capacity Building Project*, Social Impact Inc., 2007.

Table 1: Key milestones and events during Phase 1 of the ECB Project

ECB Project processes, tools and events: Phase 1	External processes influencing the ECB Project	Disasters influencing the ECB Project
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase 1 project start-up workshop with four thematic areas Mid-Term Evaluation Final External Evaluation Publication of <i>Building Trust in Diverse Teams</i> ECB's simulation model and guidelines based on Save the Children's model. Consultations with quality and accountability networks (the Sphere Project, HAP International and People in Aid) Revised Accountability and Impact Measurement (AIM) strategy (February 2006) Publication of <i>The Good Enough Guide for Accountability and Impact Measurement</i> Handbook on DRR in Ethiopia (Leaving Disasters Behind) Collaboration with NetHope 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IASC <i>Humanitarian Response Review</i> IASC Global Humanitarian Platform IASC Humanitarian Reform Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR) peer review on accountability⁵ 2007 HAP International Standard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami 2005 Niger drought 2005 Hurricane Stan (Guatemala, one of the DRR pilot countries) 2006 Java earthquake (Indonesia) 2007 Cyclone Sidr (Bangladesh)

Table 2: Key milestones and events during Phase 2 of the ECB Project

ECB Project processes, tools and events: Phase 2	External processes influencing the ECB Project	Disasters influencing the ECB Project
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch of Phase 2 Selection of ECB country-level consortia Start-up workshops and setting performance targets for agencies and consortia \$1.2 million grant from ECHO IWG Principals' endorsement of the ECB Project's Key Elements of Accountability Joint simulations and contingency planning by consortia ENHAnce (Expanding National Humanitarian Ability) programme Partnership with the CBHA MoU signed with the Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS) MoU signed with the Humanitarian Genome Project <i>Good Enough Guide</i> tools and training modules piloted Publication of <i>Toward Resilience</i> by ECB DRR Advisers Decision by IWG Principals not to continue with a 3rd phase of the project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Humanitarian reform operational⁶ IASC Needs Assessment Task Force CBHA/START IASC Task Force on Accountability to Affected Populations 2010 HAP Standard 2011 edition of the <i>Sphere Handbook</i> Joint Standards Initiative <i>Sphere for Assessments</i> IASC Transformative Agenda 2013 Kenya Initial Rapid Assessment Initiative (KIRA) Significant organisational restructuring in Save the Children, CARE and Oxfam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2009 crisis in Somalia 2009 East Java and Sumatra earthquakes 2010 Pakistan floods⁷ 2010–11 flooding and landslides in Bolivia 2011 drought in Sub-Saharan African

⁵ See SCHR Peer Review on Accountability to Affected Populations: An Overview of Lessons Learned, January 2010.

⁶ There was active participation of NGO representatives in Humanitarian Country Teams, clusters, some pooled funds and IASC forums with the status of members (instead of just observers).

⁷ Although not a consortium country, Mercy Corp's former AIM Adviser was based in Pakistan and facilitated collaborative AIM activities (training etc.) during the response.

Chapter 3

Key achievements and challenges

Successive independent evaluations have concluded that the ECB Project was a worthwhile endeavour with the potential to significantly influence how humanitarian agencies work together. It is not difficult to find good examples from the project of collaborative practice, peer-to-peer learning, useful field-tested tools and guidelines. Nevertheless, opinions amongst project participants differ on the extent to which the original vision of transformational change within participating agencies and the humanitarian sector as a whole was realised, and the extent to which the ECB Project contributed to that end. One of the key strengths of the ECB Project was its role as a rallying point for participants and partners to address shared problems through tool development, interagency team-building, learning, action research and common advocacy positions. While collaborative activities at a global level yielded a number of positive outcomes, country consortia probably achieved the most striking achievements. Even so, the project faced many challenges, discussed below in separate sections for each of the three objective areas.

Objective 1: Improving field-level capacity

Of the three objective areas in Phase 2, Objective 1 made the most progress.⁸ The three major activities under this objective were to mobilise and engage agencies in the joint planning of preparedness activities, implement those activities and share learning about those activities across the sector. While there was an emphasis on operational activities, resources were largely managed at a global level during Phase 1 of the project. During Phase 2, however, there was much more emphasis on field-level engagement in the four consortia countries and the Horn of Africa.

Partnering with another NGO consortium, ACAPS, to support joint needs assessments was viewed as one of the key factors contributing to success at field level.⁹ For the consortia, a timely shared needs assessment turned out to be not just a useful decision-making tool during an emergency response, but also an important entry point for constructive engagement with national governments and a catalyst for continuing interagency collaboration during successive phases of a response. In Bangladesh, where governments have traditionally viewed the role of international NGOs with a certain amount of distrust, there was a significant change in attitude once officials saw that NGOs were organising joint assessments that produced timely and useful results. Consortium members played a critical influencing role when the government passed its Disaster Management Act in 2012. The ECB Project contributed to a collaborative culture by providing agencies with a forum where they could address common

⁸ T. Mowjee and L. Greenhalgh, *Final Evaluation of the Emergency Capacity Building Project (Phase 2)*, 2013.

⁹ For more details of ACAPS' experiences with ECB consortia see www.acaps.org.

issues and share learning. The Bangladesh consortium was among the most active in sharing learning through monthly meetings, e-mails, workshops, training events, case studies and newsletters. It also translated a number of tools and guidelines into Bangla, including the *Good Enough Guide*, the HAP Standard and Sphere Minimum Standards.

In Bolivia the consortium helped to secure funding from Disaster Preparedness ECHO (DIPECHO) to support the Vice Ministry of Civil Defence to improve multi-actor preparedness and response coordination between the national, sub-national and local levels and revise legislation relating to preparedness and response. A collective approach facilitated learning, improved the delivery of humanitarian assistance and increased influence with the government. The consortium placed particular emphasis on humanitarian accountability, including incorporating accountability mechanisms into project design in pilot field sites, including community information and complaints mechanisms and testing accountability indicators.

In Indonesia, the ECB consortium was invited to take the lead in developing community-level assessments when the UN began working with the Indonesian government to contextualise the Multi-Sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA) mechanism. A joint evaluation carried out after the 2010 Sumatra earthquake recommended strengthened joint contingency planning for future disasters.¹⁰ Acting on this recommendation, the consortium developed a Disaster Engagement Response Protocol (DREP) that was subsequently tested during a disaster response in November 2010, with support from global ECB staff. The DREP was tested again during a simulation exercise, and was generally viewed as a good model for developing interagency joint response protocols covering team-building, joint assessments and coordinated responses.

The Horn of Africa, the only regional consortium in the ECB Project, also benefited from ACAPS support in the creation and delivery of training in rapid needs assessment data collection in Somalia and parts of Kenya and the development (in collaboration with ACAPS, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the government of Kenya) of the Kenya Initial Rapid Assessment (KIRA) Project. The KIRA played a helpful convening role for agencies during the development of a common needs assessment framework, and the approach was subsequently decentralised to regional hubs in Kenya as part of pre-election contingency planning measures during the first quarter of 2013. The multi-stakeholder approach and use of simulations was replicated in Uganda in early

¹⁰ P. Wilson, *Report of the Joint Evaluation of the Indonesian ECB Consortium's Responses to the West Java and West Sumatra Earthquakes*, 2010.

2013 to test national contingency plans, in collaboration with the Office of the Prime Minister. With People in Aid, agency staff in Uganda carried out research and published a report on staff retention and turnover, themes that had been identified as a critical issue for the region. Training modules for human resources managers were developed to equip agencies with strategies, tools and techniques for enhancing retention and addressing staff turnover. In Niger three joint evaluations were carried out following food crises in 2005, 2010 and 2012. The assessment at the beginning of the food crisis in early 2012, carried out with support from ACAPS, exposed gaps in the humanitarian response that had been overlooked during macro-level assessments, and helped agencies to prioritise their activities.

Some consortia have been more successful than others. The most significant progress was made in Bolivia, Bangladesh and Indonesia, where the consortia identified an important niche and developed collaborative relationships that led to demonstrable improvements in humanitarian policy and practice. In Bolivia the consortium is currently involved in efforts to institutionalise collaboration and carry on beyond the end of the ECB Project. The consortium in the Horn of Africa faced a number of particular challenges, including trying to cover several countries with very different operating contexts and identifying a niche where the ECB consortium could add value amongst all the other interagency initiatives based in Nairobi. There was also high staff turnover in the lead agency in Kenya. The crisis in the Horn of Africa in 2011 opened the door to a partnership with ACAPS that resulted in assessment training for Somali national staff and, later, contributed to the development of the KIRA methodology.

In Niger, unlike other country consortia, agencies did not agree on the potential added value of the ECB Project, and there was pressure on virtually all of those involved to prioritise individual agency work over collaboration. This was attributed by participants and observers to a number of factors, including the limited in-country capacity of some ECB agencies, the fact that interagency NGO coordination is a fairly recent phenomenon in Niger (it only started during the 2005 food crisis), a lack of clarity about the role of the steering committee and the uncertain role of the field facilitator, aggravated by rapid staff turnover (country directors, field facilitators, focal points and the ECHO project manager).

The ECB Project was a pioneering effort, and it was inevitable there would be birth pains as agencies began to understand the implications of increased collaboration. Staff often underestimated the time required for collaboration, particularly during the initial phases when the ECB Project had relatively little in the way of field-level systems, relevant learning or clarity about roles and responsibilities. The intention that activities should be primarily driven by field staff was sometimes difficult to reconcile with top-down demands from the global level, particularly in terms of meeting global-level objectives and reporting on results. Gaps in ECB systems (described further in the section on

management below) meant that a large grant from ECHO, while generally welcomed as an important support and a strategic collaboration, also presented a number of challenges:

For ECHO, the project's complex structure made oversight very difficult. Challenges included limited coordination between ECHO field staff and country-level consortia, making monitoring a challenge; a lack of timely information about how the project was using different sources of funding and which activities ECHO had funded and which had been funded by the Gates Foundation or other donors.¹¹

Other challenges resulted from communication gaps between the global and field levels. One example was the confusion surrounding the development of Participatory Disaster Risk Assessment methodologies by consortia at country level, while parallel efforts were happening at global level during the drafting and testing of the *Toward Resilience* guide led by the DRR group.

Objective 2: Enhancing emergency preparedness and response

The focus of Objective 2 was to increase the quality and effectiveness of emergency preparedness and response mechanisms within and across agencies participating in the ECB Project at the headquarters/global level. The aim was to reinforce senior leadership commitment to national staff capacity development, disaster risk reduction and accountability and impact measurement. From the agency perspective, in many ways it makes more sense to express achievements in terms of contributions to outcomes, rather than trying to attribute particular institutional or cultural changes to the ECB Project. This is illustrated by an extract from a final report by one of the participating agencies, Mercy Corps:

Mercy Corps, institutionally, came of 'age' during the project life of ECB with regards to global humanitarian operations, strategy and preparedness. Without the focus of ECB in several key areas of capacity building, and the peer learning obtained within the consortium, Mercy Corps would not have been able to reach the maturity of a humanitarian actor in a busy sector. One of the key findings though within the agency level, is how hard it is to sustain, replicate and promote the ECB project objectives over multiple geographic locations [and] change of leadership.¹²

The ECB Project was being implemented in an evolving operating environment, where UN-led humanitarian reform was gaining momentum, donors were increasingly prioritising DRR and HAP and the Sphere project were advocating for more accountability to disaster-affected populations. The ECB Project provided useful field testing and action research opportunities for agencies with similar mandates and capacities to collaboratively improve their systems and approaches, enabling them to adapt to these changes and

¹¹ Mowjee and Greenhalgh, *Final Evaluation*, p. 12.

¹² Mercy Corps, *ECB Project Final Report: Objective 2*, unpublished paper, 2013.

complement advocacy by other NGO networks such as SCHR and InterAction. Examples of how agencies felt that the ECB Project had contributed are provided below, mainly in the form of extracts from final agency reports.

CARE International

Collaboration and shared learning: ‘these priorities complemented the CARE International emergency strategy in place at the time ... The most commonly cited benefits of ECB among CARE staff at all three objective levels are the relationship building, improved collaboration and the collegiate and transparent exchange of ideas, experience, documents and resources that were once closely guarded’.

Facilitating institutional change: ‘ECB contributed significantly to certain areas of CARE’s work, notably in the development of CARE International’s Humanitarian Accountability Framework that was based on work done in ECB Phase I and is now a commonly accepted and monitored framework within CARE’s humanitarian work’.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS)

Collaboration and shared learning: ‘CRS has adopted the five key elements of accountability in place of developing its own accountability standards’.

Facilitating institutional change: ‘CRS led the process of drafting the popular Toward Resilience guide’.

Oxfam GB

Networking and collaboration: ‘The ECB project provided a strong incentive for technical advisors to meet regularly. Having activities to work on together, such as the development of Toward Resilience or the Expanding National Humanitarian Ability (ENHance) programme, created a platform for collaboration and exchange that reinforced each other’s views and knowledge’.

Tools and resources recognised by the sector: ‘ECB provided an opportunity to develop tools and resources that were then adopted by the agencies and in some cases by the sector as a whole. The example of *Toward Resilience* is the latest in date: the advisors saw a common need and pulled resources together to create a book that is now highly disseminated and valued in the sector. Having a platform where a variety of agencies and technical experts were providing input into ECB tools ensured higher quality standards and a good visibility within the sector’.

Institutionalising change within the Oxfam confederation: ‘Oxfam has adopted a certain number of tools developed by ECB. As an example, following the collaboration between the different ECB agencies, Oxfam adopted the accountability framework developed by ECB. The various case studies developed by ECB have regularly been used within Oxfam to promote discussion and exchange. However, it should be noted that the tools that are now most used by Oxfam are the ones that Oxfam was leading on’.

Save the Children

DRR: ‘Significant traction gained with the metamorphosis of DRR towards Resilience ... [which] is considered positive and therefore more appealing and understandable for development colleagues as opposed to DRR language that often has a humanitarian and negative connotation’.

Tools and resources: ‘Creation of practical, useful, and valuable tools such as the *Good Enough Guide* for accountability, Building Trust, the DRR Toward Resilience guide, and the *Good Enough Guide to Assessments*’.

Collaboration and learning: ‘The evolution of a valuable platform for collaboration between agencies on different levels, from our Principals, Agency Managers, Advisors, and Country Offices and Consortia, to share information and knowledge in an open and constructive manner that rarely exists’.

World Vision

‘Priorities for the ECB Project phase 2 closely matched World Vision’s own priorities for its Humanitarian & Emergency Affairs (HEA) strategy at the start ... One unanticipated benefit of the DRR Practitioners Guide (Toward Resilience) development process is that it has caused WV to look internally for examples and case studies of best practice as well as helping us to structure our own technical guidance materials in light of the work carried out through the ECB Toward Resilience Project’.

Challenges that were common to one or more agencies included:

- Cumbersome decision-making, administrative and financial systems that added to transaction costs and created frustration and confusion (described in more detail in the section on management below).
- All participants in the ECB Project worked within some kind of federated governance and, for most agencies, this meant relatively large and complex structures. While this offers the potential advantage of global reach, in practice it proved difficult to ensure full participation due to competing agendas and priorities, particularly since the bulk of ECB agency budgets were allocated to longer-term development activities. The focus of the ECB Project at headquarters, country and sector level meant that agencies such as Oxfam were handicapped as many key decisions are taken at the regional level.
- Even though Phase 2 was a long-term project much of the planning was on an annual basis. This was attributed to various factors, including the nature of planning systems and continuing uncertainty about the project’s financial position. It was felt that there could have been stronger links between internal and ECB initiatives with a theory of change and implementation plan that could be more clearly linked to agency strategies.

Objective 3: Collective dialogue, knowledge sharing, learning and collaborative work

Through Objective 3, agencies explored opportunities to improve humanitarian emergency preparedness and res-

ponse through collective dialogue, knowledge sharing, learning and collaborative work. There was evidence of good working relationships with organisations on specific activities, such as joint needs assessments, engagement with quality and accountability networks, evaluations and staff training. ECB agencies also gained sector-wide acceptance for tools such as the Key Elements of Accountability. Collaboration was most constructive where there was a close match between the work plans of agency staff, ECB Project objectives and the skills, technical expertise and the priorities of the organisation or network concerned. Most of the field consortia saw the benefits of working in consortia, both from a learning perspective and in terms of enhanced influence. Some of the underlying factors in this success are illustrated by the Accountability and Impact Measurement (AIM) Adviser Group:

- A specific focus on accountability to disaster-affected people in the AIM component of the ECB Project and in Adviser job descriptions made it easier to identify common interests.
- AIM Advisers developed a shared work plan with designated leads and co-leads for each activity area, and made efforts to meet face-to-face at least twice a year to review progress.
- AIM Advisers developed common advocacy positions and took turns taking on representation roles. This had the double advantage of amplifying their influence by being able to speak on behalf of several large INGOs, and meant fewer meetings.
- Training and technical support from a deployable team of accountability and impact specialists was not targeted only at a single agency, increasing efficiency and effectiveness.

By the time Phase 2 was launched, the ECB Project had acquired a reputation for good quality and innovative approaches to joint action.¹³ A summary of key engagements with external networks is provided below under each of the specific results areas of Phase 2.

Field testing of standards, tools and research: by 2013, standards, tools and research from at least three significant sector networks and institutions will have been piloted by country consortia and agency teams, and experience will have been fed back into the networks

- Strategic collaboration with ACAPS to improve the quality of secondary data analysis and support joint needs assessments at country level.
- Oxfam led a collaboration on behalf of the ECB Project with the CBHA to pilot a humanitarian staff development project.¹⁴
- ECB Project agencies, in consultation with the Shelter

¹³ T. Beck and M. Buchanan-Smith, *Joint Evaluations Coming of Age? The Quality and Future Scope of Joint Evaluations*, ALNAP's 7th Review of Humanitarian Action, 2008.

¹⁴ J. Cosgrave et al., *Evaluation of the Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies (CBHA) Pilot*, DARA, 2012.

Cluster and the Task Force for Accountability to Affected Populations, developed Shelter Accountability guidance and tools for Shelter Cluster coordinators and other decision-makers involved in humanitarian shelter programmes.

- People in Aid supported the ECB Project in developing capacity assessments in country consortia.

Sharing of the field perspective: by 2013, learning from country consortium work and ECB agency work will have been documented and presented in at least three major sector forums and published in at least three separate sector journals

- Five 'ECB Interactive' events were held between November 2011 and February 2012 in each consortium, attended by over 660 individuals representing 150 agencies from 33 different countries. Local and national government representatives participated in some of these events, and in Uganda representatives of the government presented a session and led plenary discussions.¹⁵
- ECB Project experience was documented in an article in *Humanitarian Exchange* in 2009.¹⁶

Filling research gaps: by 2013, at least five relevant research knowledge gaps identified by ECB agencies will have been filled with useful academic research

- In September 2012 a document entitled *What We Know about Collaboration: The ECB Country Consortium Experience* was published.
- Agencies partnered with the University of Groningen, which secured a grant from the Humanitarian Innovation Fund in 2012 to develop the Humanitarian Genome. This system uses open-source technology to develop a cloud-based search engine for evaluations and lessons learned data to enable quick access to information in operational contexts.
- Oxfam, supported by AIM focal points from other ECB agencies and in partnership with the University of East Anglia and Oxford Policy Management (OPM), field-tested and published a guide to identifying the contribution to change achieved by external interventions in the recovery period following disasters.¹⁷
- In 2012, the ECB Project and ACAPS collaborated on another article in *Humanitarian Exchange* documenting joint assessment experiences during the food crisis in Niger.¹⁸

Disseminating ECB-developed tools and methods: by 2013, awareness and implementation of ECB-developed

¹⁵ ECB Project, *ECB Interactive Regional Learning Conferences Global Learning Report*, 2012.

¹⁶ M. R. Janz, 'Collaboration and Partnership in Humanitarian Action', *Humanitarian Exchange*, no. 45, December 2009.

¹⁷ R. Few et al., *Contribution to Change: An Approach To Evaluating the Role of Intervention in Disaster Recovery*, Practical Action Publishing, 2014.

¹⁸ Z. Mamane Sani and A. Stewart, 'Coordinated Needs Assessments: The Value of a Collaborative Process', *Humanitarian Exchange*, no. 55, September 2012.

pragmatic tools, methods and approaches will have increased through participation in sector networks and forums, communications outreach and the external ECB Project website

- The Key Elements of Accountability developed in Phase 2 to provide a common framework for ECB agencies found a receptive audience in the IASC in 2011. The Key Elements were used as the basis of the IASC's five Commitments on Accountability to Affected People/Populations.
- The mid-term evaluation of Phase 2 reviewed tracking data for the external ECB website and found them to be above industry norms.¹⁹ Visitors to the external site were based in 147 countries, including both ECB consortia and non-consortium countries such as Haiti and Pakistan. In November 2013 the number of unique visits to the site each month had risen to over 7,000. The mid-term evaluation also found the distribution of monthly ECB e-Newsletters had grown from 600 to 1,500-plus recipients within a year.

The ECB Project initially faced the challenge of justifying its existence amid other interagency initiatives. However, misgivings were dispelled once communications improved and products and activities became better known. The UN-led humanitarian reform process, with its emphasis on coordinated action, also validated the project's objectives.²⁰ There was broad appreciation of the ECB Project's operational focus, and the consortia were viewed as fertile ground for action research and useful vehicles for putting standards into practice. One example is the *Good Enough Guide for Accountability and Impact Measurement*, which was developed to meet demands from field staff for practical guidance on how to put communities at the centre of their work. While standards developed by quality and accountability networks were seen as valuable, agencies were struggling to put them into practice. The guide emphasises a 'good enough' approach that favours simple solutions over elaborate ones and guides the user with 'how to' tools that are field-tested and simple to implement. The guide also provides a basic introduction to standard-setting initiatives. It has been translated into at least 13 languages, including eight spontaneous translations, and its contribution has been acknowledged by other networks, including the Sphere Project.

Thematic groups

For most of the Advisers in the three thematic groups, the ECB Project represented an important cross-agency and cross-sector learning mechanism.

¹⁹ Tracking data showed 12,500 visits during 2009–10, and 18,000 the following year. In 2001, page views averaged 3.8 (up from 3.65 in 2009–10) and time-per-visit averaged 3.51 minutes. There were 5,400 downloads in the year from May 2010.

²⁰ During the initial phase of IASC humanitarian reform one of the IWG Principals noted that, while the process was largely UN-led, the ECB Project provided an opportunity for NGOs to explore what humanitarian reform meant from their perspective.

Staff Capacity Group

Surveys and evaluations consistently found a high level of satisfaction amongst participants following capacity-building activities supported by the Staff Capacity Group, though it proved difficult to concretely measure changes in staff capacity, and the group could not decide whether its role was to build staff capacity in general or focus on developing surge capacities. During Phase 1 the group produced a joint study with People in Aid looking at emergency surge capacity²¹ and a guide to building trust in diverse teams.²²

During Phase 2, two work streams generated significant demand at country level and proved to be particularly useful catalysts for learning and collaborative action. The first, a simulation module, became a useful interagency resource, and simulations were carried out in all consortia during Phase 2. The second work stream was capacity-building of national staff. During Phase 2 a strategic partnership was formed with the CBHA to develop the ENHance programme, based on training material developed and piloted by CBHA. The programme consisted of two components:

- A six-month Core Skills Development Program for national staff with limited or no experience of working in emergencies.
- A nine-month Management and Leadership Skills Development Program for national staff with some experience of working in emergencies, and who manage people in their current roles.

Ten courses ran during 2012, involving 189 humanitarian staff from 18 countries. The training used a mix of learning methods, including workshops, one-to-one coaching, independent learning, 'buddy groups' with fellow participants, an emergency simulation and an associated learning event. A survey of participants and their managers found that virtually everyone felt that the programme had been effective in helping them to apply humanitarian principles and standards, and provided a valuable opportunity to work with and learn from staff from different organisations.²³ The level of support participants received from their line managers was a critical factor in the effectiveness and application of learning.

Accountability and Impact Measurement Group

External evaluations and reviews found that this thematic group generally functioned better than the other two. The main achievements under this theme were the development of the Key Elements of Accountability; the interagency Standing Team, whose members were deployed to help improve systems for accountability to aid recipients; and the development of training and communication tools

²¹ R. Houghton, *Surge Capacity in the Humanitarian and Development Sector*, People in Aid, 2007.

²² *Building Trust in Diverse Teams: The Toolkit for Emergency Response*, Oxfam GB for the ECB Project, 2007.

²³ ECB Project, ECB E-newsletter, September 2013, <http://www.ecbproject.org/resources/library/449-ecb-e-newsletter-september-2013>.

for the *Good Enough Guide*. Outputs tended to focus on accountability rather than impact measurement. This was the only Advisory Group where the final evaluation was able to observe evidence of sustainability, in the form of Advisers collaborating during the response to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines after the ECB Project had finished. The group also invested the most in cultivating external relationships. There were initial concerns about overlap with other quality and accountability initiatives, though these eased once it was accepted that ECB agencies were mainly interested in applying, rather than setting, standards. As mentioned above, Phase 2 saw the group develop additional tools, such as the Key Elements of Accountability and *Contribution to Change: An Approach To Evaluating the Role of Intervention in Disaster Recovery*. On the whole, however, during Phase 2 the Advisory Group gave priority to promoting the application of the *Good Enough Guide* and other existing tools, rather than developing new ones.

Disaster Risk Reduction Group

The *Toward Resilience* guide is widely considered one of the most significant achievements of the ECB Project's collaborative approach. The process of developing the guide took over three years, and was highly consultative and resource-intensive. It included two field workshops in each of the five consortia, two global workshops and two drafts, which were reviewed by DRR Advisers and an external editorial committee. Both drafts were translated into French and Spanish, while the first draft was field-tested and reviewed at country level. The final guide has so far been published in English, French and Spanish.

Like the Staff Capacity Group, members of the DRR Group faced the challenge of competing priorities when the objectives of the ECB Project were not aligned with those of their own agencies. The World Vision DRR Adviser, for example, found it difficult to gain internal acceptance of ECB tools since there were already three different DRR assessment tools in use within the agency. IWG Principals and ECB managers in the different agencies often found that their individual work plans were not necessarily consistent with ECB Project priorities.

ECB Project governance and management

There is little doubt that the ECB Project could not have achieved as much as it did without strong commitment from the humanitarian leaders within each of the participating agencies, along with support in the form of motivated ECB Project staff. At the same time, together with staff turnover and constant pressure to raise additional funds, cumbersome project structures and heavy processes were probably the single biggest challenges to the ECB Project and proved to be one of the main motivations behind the eventual decision by the IWG Principals not to continue with a third phase. As noted in the final evaluation of Phase 2, 'These processes included high levels of project participation, reporting (narrative and financial reports) and consensus based decision-making that delayed decisions. In a profession where most staff are overworked with too many commitments, this inefficiency became a significant

impediment to stakeholder commitment. In the end, too many people involved in the project simply found that they did not have enough time for it'.²⁴ Evaluations and agency and consortia reports pointed to problems with management and governance, and there is little evidence of any improvement over the lifespan of the project.

Many of these problems can be attributed to the fact that the management, information and financial systems of different agencies are set up mainly for their own internal use. Three agencies (CARE, Oxfam and Save the Children) were trying to align systems within their own confederations, and dealing with relatively complex external ECB systems was an additional burden. The fact that agencies were unable to find a solution to problems of management and governance suggest that these problems have systematic roots which minor adjustments and good will alone will not address. Major obstacles included a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities, the complex and multi-layered structure of the project, the location of decision-making authority, fundraising, inadequate financial tracking systems, staff turnover, communications and knowledge management and the demands of working in different languages, which entailed devoting a significant amount of time and money on translation.

Lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities

The structure of the project was multi-layered and complex. Although decision-making protocols were developed early in Phase 2, there remained three main areas where lack of clarity hindered the project. The first was around whether decision-making authority lay with the Principals or with the ECB Project Management Team. The second area was the extent to which the Project Management Team was responsible for delivering project activities and results. The third area concerned whether agency or project staff were responsible for liaising with sector networks and other humanitarian organisations for collaboration, knowledge sharing and information dissemination.

Financial requirements and inadequate tracking systems

Phase 2 envisaged a \$7 million match for the \$5 million in funding received from the Gates Foundation. Raising this money during the height of the global financial crisis proved challenging, and the ECB Project was perceived by some as a drain on internal resources which outweighed its potential benefits. While the grant from ECHO contributed to the matching fund pot, the project management and administrative requirements associated with the grant put more strain on an already unwieldy system. Some agencies chose to split activity groups into smaller packages to attract prospective donors that helped raise additional funds. It was anticipated that this approach would broaden awareness about the ECB Project amongst donors but, in some cases, it resulted in activities being implemented more as individual agency projects rather than as integral parts of the ECB Project.

²⁴ Mowjee and Greenhalgh, *Final Evaluation*.

Staff turnover

Staff turnover undermined consistent engagement by the Principals and ECB Project Managers. Turnover of ECB Field Facilitators was also a significant challenge in some of the consortia. This adversely affected implementation as well as engagement with external stakeholders.

Communication and knowledge management

In the beginning the ECB Project lacked both a communications strategy and dedicated communications staff. These problems were remedied later during Phase 1 and a revised communication strategy was put in place for Phase 2 to help guide decision-making processes and disseminate learning to agency staff and external stakeholders. Communication nevertheless continued to pose a challenge.

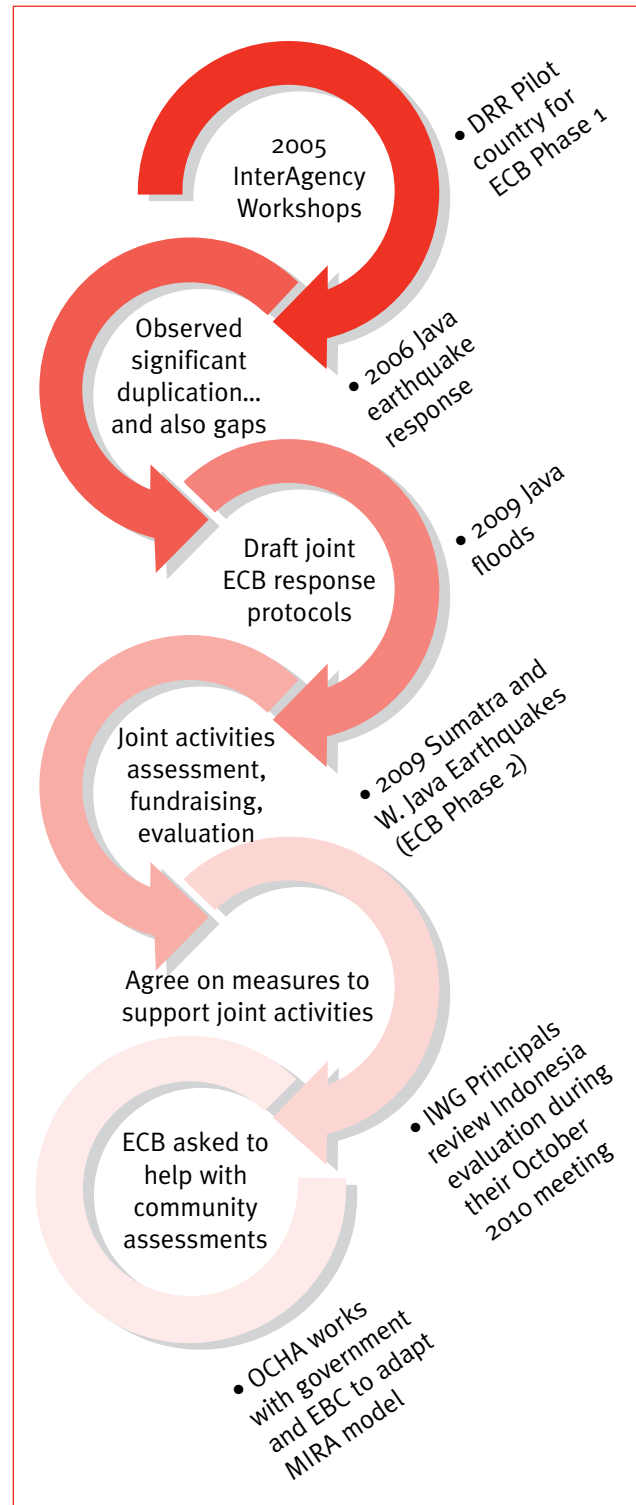
Given the constructive partnership with NetHope during Phase 1, the decision was taken not to include an ITC component in Phase 2 with the expectation that NetHope would fill this role. This proved unrealistic, and during Phase 2 agencies participating in the ECB Project relied largely on systems that were not necessarily adapted for use by multiple agencies. The result was a number of parallel efforts; for example, country consortia established their own web-based systems to support joint work and a separate website was set up for the team of deployable accountability and impact specialists. The lack of a common budget tracking web-based platform can also be partly attributed to the lack of IT capacity.

Learning and knowledge management

The ECB Project's emphasis on learning and capacity-building, not just for the agencies involved but also for the humanitarian sector as a whole, meant that the ECB Project generated a considerable amount of learning. Reflection and feedback were integrated into ways of working, and there was a noticeable change in attitudes towards accountability and learning over the life of the project, particularly at field level. It is a constant challenge to identify staff in country field offices who are willing and have the time to field test and pilot new tools and approaches. During the life of the ECB Project, there was a noticeable shift so that country consortia were not only allocating funding themselves to support accountability and learning activities, but were also increasingly demanding technical support. Figure 1 illustrates such a learning cycle in the Indonesia consortium during the two project phases.

A dedicated communications focal point facilitated knowledge management and helped with quality assurance to ensure that ECB Project products were user-friendly for the intended target audience. The demand from the field was for practical tools, and the increasing influence of field staff during Phase 2 ensured not only that their views were respected, but also that they became closely involved in

Figure 1: Indonesia's ECB Consortium Learning Cycle



drafting, piloting and revising guidance and tools. Staff around the world were heavily involved in the production of both the *Good Enough Guide* and the *Toward Resilience* guide, and in both cases the main authors acted as 'ghost writers' guided by staff in the field.

- Clearly define roles and responsibilities for collaborative activities, including how processes will be led.²⁸
- Go where the energy and interest is: encourage members interested in particular activities to take them on and move them forward.
- Consider hiring a dedicated ‘consortium facilitator’ and involve a number of agencies in the recruitment process.
- Agree reporting templates and a monitoring and evaluation framework so that each partner gathers data in a similar way and results can be collated and analysed quickly.
- Use simulation exercises to develop understanding of how each agency functions.
- Expect problems and do not be discouraged by disagreements.

Align priorities with organisational strategies and individual work plans

Collaborations are likely to be easier if they are between agencies with similar mandates, capacities and structures. Similarly, implementation is likely to be simpler if project objectives are aligned with the priorities and work plans of individual staff. This will help ensure that leadership remains committed, expectations are reasonable and staff are not pulled in different directions by competing priorities. The less alignment there is, the more resources will need to be allocated, for example to pay for staff time. However, it also needs to be recognised that building trust and collaboration takes time and therefore adequate time for consultation and reflection needs to be factored into staff work plans.

Invest in building trust

While not necessarily an explicit goal of the ECB Project, the IWG Principals felt that building trust to create teams that work outside their own agencies was key to the success of the ECB Project. The experience of the ECB Project demonstrated that trust was indeed a critical element in collaboration, with many examples of staff increasingly willing to share information without fear of reprisals, working together as an effective team or stepping in to provide support when an agency is struggling to meet its commitments. It is not surprising that the highest levels of trust were developed within those groups that had regular face-to-face meetings, the IWG Principals, members of country consortia and AIM Advisers. This implies that successful collaboration means accepting a certain level of transaction costs.

Allow space for reflection, innovation and iterative learning

There were tensions between the reflective field-driven approaches in the project design and a focus on deliverables and results. Virtually all of the ECB’s ‘flagship’ products, such as *Toward Resilience* and the *Good Enough*

²⁸ The AIM Advisory Group, for example, developed a joint work plan with designated leads and co-leads – see L. Ishida and K. Love, ‘ECB Examining an Inter-Agency Community of Practice: The ECB Accountability and Impact Measurement Advisory Group’, <http://www.alnap.org/node/11630.aspx>, 2011.

Guide, took years to complete, and experienced many ‘two steps forward, one step back’ moments. Both exercises showed the need to allow time for consultations and field-testing to ensure user-friendliness and promote ownership. Project design needs to be flexible enough to provide adequate space for reflection, as well as space to search for and test innovative solutions. The process of producing publications and tools could perhaps have been made less burdensome through more systematic use of writeshop approaches.²⁹

Identify products and processes that can really influence change and use these as a rallying point

A focus on practical tools and guidance that are perceived as filling important gaps, such as the *Good Enough Guide* and *Toward Resilience*, catalysed widespread collaboration, ownership and uptake. Participation in their production was truly global – as implied in the page-long list of contributors to the *Good Enough Guide*. The guide became a best-seller for the publisher the day after its release and, in addition to being published in five language versions, has also been translated spontaneously into at least eight languages. *Toward Resilience* became the ECB website’s most downloaded item within a week of publication. Creating a product that participants immediately used had a number of positive outcomes in the form of increased trust, greater cooperation on other activities and team-building. The process of collaboration around the *Good Enough Guide* led to a number of follow-up activities during Phase 2 to promote its use, and one of the regrets of some members of the DRR Advisory Group was that there were no comparable opportunities to undertake follow-up activities around *Toward Resilience*, which was published towards the end of Phase 2.

Seek strategic partnerships that can be catalysts for change

While there are clear advantages in collaborating with agencies and staff with similar approaches and work plans, the ECB Project’s experience with strategic partners such as ACAPS demonstrated that complementary relationships with dissimilar agencies can also yield very positive outcomes. Starting with Indonesia, interest in joint needs assessments spread to other consortia. Initial efforts at joint assessments by consortia in Indonesia and Bolivia were not very satisfactory, but this changed quickly once ACAPS advisers arrived and started providing technical support during Phase 2.³⁰ By the end of Phase 2, the quality and usefulness of joint assessments had greatly improved in all the consortia, facilitating constructive engagement with national governments at a policy level.

²⁹ The writeshop process was pioneered by the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction to produce information materials on various topics relating to agriculture, the environment and health. See <http://www.writeshops.org>.

³⁰ ACAPS has also benefited from this relationship with consortia since it provided access to an operational base in disaster-affected areas and increased access to data for the development of disaster needs assessments. See <http://www.acaps.org/en/disaster-needs-analysis>.

The importance of communication

The importance of a good communications strategy and adequate resources (including a communications coordinator and a common web-based platform) should not be underestimated for a large collaborative initiative like the ECB Project. Apart from fund-raising and advocacy, the communication systems of individual agencies tend to be internally focused, increasing transaction costs and impeding progress. A dedicated communications function was not included in the original project team, making it more difficult to explain what the ECB Project was aiming at. A Communications Coordinator position was added later once it became clear how important internal and external communications were to a project involving so many actors. During Phase 2, the envisaged partnership with NetHope did not materialise, resulting in an over-reliance on e-mail communications and leaving many staff involved in the ECB Project trying to find their own IT solutions.

Measuring progress

A primary aim of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) during Phase 1 was to determine whether it was worth investing time and resources (both agencies' and donors') in a full phase. A dedicated M&E position was created in the project team and there were concerted attempts to develop baselines, indicators and tracking systems. While this was helpful in certain respects, the increased emphasis on tracking progress against annual performance plans in some ways distracted participants from the transformational vision of the ECB Project. This factor, along with constant staff turnover, suggests that it is important to build in reflective processes that help refocus participants on the theory of change and ensure that objectives remain consistent with this vision.

Ensure that management and governance are fit for purpose

Management and governance was a continuous source of frustration and a weak point in an otherwise stimulating initiative, undermining its efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability and damaging the morale of those involved in its oversight and management. This was despite best intentions and good levels of trust and goodwill between staff, and the fact that project objectives were largely met and, in many cases, exceeded. In hindsight, insufficient attention was probably paid to trying to understanding the underlying incentives and other drivers involved in collaborative working. The ECB Project was a complex undertaking, where project staff were primarily facilitators and the decision-makers (the IWG Principals) were senior agency staff who already had substantial workloads, especially during large humanitarian operations. Activities were supposed to be mainly field-driven with technical support available on demand, but many of the IWG Principals had not been able to observe ECB Project activities themselves and thus did not have a good grasp of outcomes and potential impacts at field level. Interagency systems set up under the project were often perceived as an add-on to agencies' own systems, some of which were already quite complex. While many agency staff, particularly field staff in consortia and Advisory Groups, saw the ECB Project adding considerable value to their work, others felt that the project increased their workload. The experience suggests that there are systemic obstacles to efficient interagency collaboration. A study seeking to understand the underlying factors in the management and governance challenges faced during the ECB Project is probably warranted, especially since similar difficulties have arisen during other efforts at interagency collaboration.³¹

³¹ See, for example, J. Steets et al., *IASC Cluster Approach Evaluation, Phase 2: Synthesis Report*, GPPI, 2010.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The initiators of the ECB Project set out on an uncertain course in 2005 with the expectation that investment in a collaborative approach would better meet the needs of people affected by disasters. By the time the project came to an end, it had developed a reputation as a convener (particularly consortia at country level) and a source of useful learning and field-tested tools for humanitarian staff. The project allowed networks, UN agencies, research institutions and other external stakeholders to directly interface at an operational level with major international NGOs, and provided direct access to consortia at country level and technical working groups focusing on staff development, humanitarian accountability and performance measurement and disaster risk reduction.

The ECB Project was conceived before humanitarian reform had begun, and there is now much more coordination and collaboration involving NGOs. This is not to say that a similar initiative could not be valuable, but it is perhaps time to step back, re-evaluate and determine how future NGO collaborations could best influence the delivery of humanitarian assistance. As a guide, it seems appropriate to conclude with a checklist for NGOs considering similar collaborative ventures based on learning from the ECB Project:

- Identify common challenges that can be addressed collectively, and which justify the additional transaction costs of collaboration.
- Look for alignment in current and future work plans, while recognising that some positions, such as project management, will need to be funded from project resources.
- While collaboration is often easiest when working with agencies with similar approaches and capacities, look also for strategic partnerships that can bring technical expertise to activities identified as priorities.
- For humanitarian operations, producing useful common needs assessments sets the stage for productive colla-

laboration during successive phases of a response.

- Have a strong project and external communications capacity, recognising that each agency has its own internal communications systems that are not necessarily compatible with the systems of others.
- There is an important global role in creating space, encouraging reflection and reflecting on commitments.
- Allocate time and other resources to building trust and developing new ways of working.
- Recognise that interagency systems (management, financing, information management) do not necessarily work in the same way as internal processes. Allocate responsibilities for leading systems and processes and ensure accountability. Document roles and responsibilities and periodically review progress.
- Look for strategic entry points to engage with related processes such as UN-led humanitarian processes, with an emphasis on operationalisation through field-testing of processes, tools and guidelines.
- Take a long-term phased approach, but break it up into phases that are no longer than three years to ensure that the process can adapt to changes in the operating environment so that project activities remain relevant to participating agencies.
- For humanitarian consortia, having a good joint needs assessment process is the key that can unlock many doors. Doors opened during the ECB Project included systematic joint emergency preparedness planning, constructive collaboration during the response and recovery phases and transparent peer-to-peer learning processes.
- Exit strategies can often take on forms that may not necessarily have a project 'brand'.
- If innovation and learning is a specific objective of the collaboration, ensure that the type of funding and administrative requirements of the donor are supportive of this objective.

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Network Papers 2003–2014

Network Papers are contributions on specific experiences or issues prepared either by HPN members or contributing specialists.

- 43 *Housing Reconstruction after Conflict and Disaster* by Sultan Barakat (2003)
- 44 *Livelihoods and Protection: Displacement and Vulnerable Communities in Kismaayo, Southern Somalia* by Simon Narbeth and Calum McLean (2003)
- 45 *Reproductive Health for Conflict-affected People: Policies, Research and Programmes* by Therese McGinn et al. (2004)
- 46 *Humanitarian futures: practical policy perspectives* by Randolph Kent (2004)
- 47 *Missing the point: an analysis of food security interventions in the Great Lakes* by S Levine and C Chastre with S Ntububa, J MacAskill, S Lejeune, Y Guluma, J Acidri and A Kirkwood
- 48 *Community-based therapeutic care: a new paradigm for selective feeding in nutritional crises* by Steve Collins
- 49 *Disaster preparedness programmes in India: a cost benefit analysis* by Courtenay Cabot Venton and Paul Venton (2004)
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