

Chapter 1

Disaster Management and Multilateral Humanitarian Aid: Parallelism vs. Combined Forces

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1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a “practitioner’s perspective”¹ on an aspect of the changing dynamics among the actors engaged in humanitarian response, namely disaster management actors and multilateral humanitarian aid actors. How these two groups relate to each other is symptomatic of the challenges in the international humanitarian system today, and harbinger of the changes that will take place in the next few years. A fuller understanding will be important for developing and training future humanitarian actors.

A traditional view (ALNAP 2012)² of humanitarian actors places “core actors” of the humanitarian system into three categories:

- the providers: donor governments, foundations
- the recipients: host governments, affected population
- the implementers: the Red Cross/Crescent Movement, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), national non-governmental organizations (NNGOs) and United Nations agencies.

¹ It is called a “practitioner’s perspective” as it is based on the observation of the author in her interaction with Members States of the United Nations and with policy makers, and in her involvement in responding to the major humanitarian crises during her tenure as Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator.

² ALNAP, the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action, is a learning and research network. Its members are key humanitarian organizations and experts from across the humanitarian sector: donors, NGOs, the Red Cross/Crescent, the UN, independents and academics.

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This traditional view is largely a legacy of the post-Cold War conceptualization of international humanitarian aid. Simplistically put, it envisioned a world in which rich countries funded multilateral organizations, and their sub-contractors, to work in poor and fragile states with humanitarian situations. It formed the basis of an attempt to establish an “international humanitarian system” through a UN General Assembly Resolution (46/182), which, in 1991, created a coordinating department within the United Nations Secretariat, established a senior position of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, and formed an umbrella inter-agency coordinating and policy-making body of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). The IASC is inclusive of the UN agencies and major international NGOs through their consortia, while coordinating with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) who have standing invitees status. National and community-based non-governmental organizations, while increasingly more involved with IASC in the 20 years since, still operate largely at the periphery of the system.

The role of states is clearly recognized in UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182. Affected states have “the primary role in the initiation, organization, coordination, and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory.” Their role is also increasingly codified in a body of law, under the rubric of international disaster response laws. However, it could be noted that the traditional view sees governments as only donors/providers and hosts/recipients, and not as implementers. It is somewhat surprising that this subtext has endured even into recent reports and writing, even as the same authors note that national governments are increasingly adopting more active roles in responding to humanitarian disasters, ones that go beyond acting as “hosts” and inviting international assistance.³

From the point of view of many countries, the important development is the strengthening of their own disaster management capabilities. It is therefore well observed⁴ that many countries are strengthening their national disaster management structures, including central and decentralized agencies, legislative frameworks and overall governance. Even some of the smallest countries (from Botswana to Bhutan) now have national disaster management agencies or departments and national legislation, with varying degrees of effectiveness. When disasters strike, many disaster-prone countries, especially those who in the last two decades have joined the ranks of middle-income countries, wish to lead, control and be responsible for the “initiation, organization, coordination and implementation” of disaster response. This response, may or may not involve the use of international assistance, and may or may not involve the multilateral system.

³ In fairness to ALNAP, in 2010, it hosted its 26th Annual Meeting (ALNAP 2010). However, its meeting report, which drew from Harvey (2009) still puts the first role of a national government as “responsible for ‘calling’ a crisis and inviting international aid”.

⁴ Of the 37 countries covered by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Asia-Pacific Regional Office, 36 have established national disaster management authorities.

In developing disaster management capabilities, state authorities generally engage civil protection, even civil defense, personnel and precepts. From the traditionalist point of view, it raises concerns regarding adherence to humanitarian principles, sovereignty and access, and capacity. Given the different points of departure, an important questions for the future evolution of the international humanitarian system is how to engage state authorities in working towards common humanitarian objectives.

1.2 Contrasting Interests

A cursory review of the topics and themes of interest to the major humanitarian policy and research institutions and think tanks⁵ in the last decade reveals an unsurprising list of topics, very much related to the traditional conceptualization of the humanitarian aid architecture.

On the providers, one finds discussion under the rubric of “humanitarian financing” topics such as funding mechanisms (e.g. pool funds), funding according to need (impartiality), sufficiency of funding against need, and donorship of so-called emerging donors.

On the recipients, much is written about (weaknesses in) communication with, and accountability to, affected population and needs assessments. Recent interest in cash transfers has given better recognition to recipients’ self-help aspirations. As to host governments, the coverage seldom veers outside of issues of sovereignty, and government’s role in access (including invitation for outside intervention) and humanitarian space.

Not unexpectedly, there is more published on issues related to the implementers than either the providers or the recipients. There is continuing discussion and debate on the accountability, competence and coordination of the implementing actors, and indeed, whether they use or take advantage of research, evaluation and other evidence-based information. Since the so-called War on Terror, there is heightened interest in the security of humanitarian workers. Interest in the humanitarian system architecture and system effectiveness generally centres around the implementers.⁶ In the last few years, there is increasing pre-occupation with the ever widening cast of actors who work in, or near, the humanitarian sphere, but who are not part of the “core actors” group. All policy and research institutions are paying more attention to the growing presence of Islamic players, whether governments, aid providers, funders, or host cultures, in an attempt to foster deeper understanding. It is probably

⁵ Including, among others, Humanitarian Policy Group of the Overseas Development Institute (UK), the Feinstein International Center (US), DARA (Spain), and ALNAP (international network).

⁶ As can be seen in the reaction to the coordination aspects, especially on clusters and humanitarian coordinators, of the Humanitarian Reform Initiative (which started in 2005) and the Transformative Agenda (started in 2010), both initiative by then Emergency Relief Coordinator.

not inaccurate to say that the current revival in debate on the relevance and salience of the humanitarian principles is derived directly from observation of this increasing diversity in actors (whether military, peacekeepers, private sectors, or governmental or non-governmental groups from regionally significant countries) and from the involvement of Islamic players. This debate is not only academic, but actively pursued within the traditional implementers circles themselves.

The major (and mostly Western) donors fund and support these areas of research and policy discussions.

Contrast this to the interests of state authorities of countries in managing disasters, including those with humanitarian consequences, and features of “civil protection” as an overall approach, pervades discussions.

Interestingly, there is no common, globally accepted definition of the term “civil protection” [just as there is no globally accepted definition of “humanitarianism” (Davies 2012)]. It is generally accepted as being derived from the Cold War concept of “civil defense”⁷ and is covered under Article 61 of Additional Protocol I of the Geneva Convention. The Article refers to the “humanitarian tasks intended to protect the civilian population against the dangers, and to help it to recover from the immediate effects, of hostilities or disasters and also to provide the conditions necessary for its survival”.⁸ For many, “civil defense”, “civil protection”, “civil safety” and “emergency management” all involve state entities and assets established to prevent and mitigate the effect of disasters on persons, property and environmental structures, though “crisis management” emphasizes the political and security dimension rather than measures to address the immediate needs of the population. The common denominator is that response mechanisms include civilian first responders, military and paramilitary personnel and assets and are, generally, under civilian lead.

⁷ Civil defense generally refers to an effort to protect the citizens of a state from military attack and became widespread during the Cold War with the threat of nuclear weapons. Since the end of the Cold War, the focus of civil defense has largely shifted from military attack to emergencies and disasters in general.

⁸ These tasks include: (1) warning; (2) evacuation; (3) management of shelters; (4) management of blackout measures; (5) rescue; (6) medical services, including first aid, and religious assistance; (7) fire-fighting; (8) detection and marking of danger areas; (9) decontamination and similar protective measures; (10) provision of emergency accommodation and supplies; (11) emergency assistance in the restoration and maintenance of order in distressed areas; (12) emergency repair of indispensable public utilities; (13) emergency disposal of the dead; (14) assistance in the preservation of objects essential for survival; (15) complementary activities necessary to carry out any of the tasks mentioned above, including, but not limited to, planning and organization. (Article 61, Additional Protocol I (1997), Geneva Conventions.)

The increasing strength of national disaster management, especially in Asia and Latin America in the past decade, has drawn heavily from the world of civil protection. This has included strengthened national disaster management agencies (NDMA) usually headed by someone with a civil protection or military background.⁹

Unlike humanitarian action, there are few non-governmental institutions or think tanks with policy or research focus on civil protection. Academic institutions at the tertiary level offer courses and degree or certification programs, usually under the rubric of disaster or emergency management rather than civil protection. Individual contributing professions, such as engineers or medical or paramedical personnel, also have specialization in emergency response and management. Governmental bodies and practitioners in civil protection organize conferences, trade shows and workshops aimed at sharing of ideas and reaching commonalities amongst players. The thematic focus of academic courses and practitioners' gatherings emphasizes:

- policies and procedures for maximization of availability and utilization of first responders' resources
- common standards and methodology of resources, in particular, of equipment, deployment of personnel and central emergency centres
- personal preparedness of citizens
- business and community continuity
- training and readiness.

While the Additional Protocol of the Geneva Conventions referred to civil defense as involving *humanitarian* tasks, within the civil protection circle, humanitarian principles are very rarely a topic *per se*.¹⁰ It becomes an issue of concern only when the discussion turns to the use of (national) civil protection and civil defense assets in international response deemed to be of a humanitarian nature (e.g. Protezione Civile and Cooperazione Italiana allo Sviluppo 2011; MCDA 2012). When raised, it is usually by the humanitarian traditionalists.

1.3 The Role of Governments

A fundamental canon of international humanitarian assistance is that it is called on if and when State authorities are unable or unwilling to address the needs of those affected in times of (large scale) humanitarian emergencies within its borders. In addition to the recognition of the primary role of state authorities in "the initiation,

⁹The European Union integrated the EU Civil Protection Mechanism into the European Commission's humanitarian aid department while keeping its acronym ECHO, formerly the European Community Humanitarian Office.

¹⁰In European Commissions documents, e.g. Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Management Plan of December 2012, the two respective mandates—humanitarian assistance and civil protection—are treated as distinct. Adherence to humanitarian principles is referenced only in the case of humanitarian assistance.

organization, coordination, and implementation of humanitarian assistance” in United Nations General Assembly Resolution 46/182 (1991), the resolution also states that, “Inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations working impartially and with strictly humanitarian motives should continue to make significant contribution in *supplementing* [italics added] national efforts.”¹¹ Yet studies after studies have shown that the oft-repeated mantra of “there only to support the Government” by the multilateral aid system is seldom manifested in reality, and usually awkwardly implemented when attempted.

The role of governments as an issue of interest for the international humanitarian community began to emerge in the past few years, in part because of events such as the Myanmar Nargis Cyclone, the development of a body of law on disaster response (commonly known as international disaster response laws) spearheaded by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and an increasing number of evaluations citing difficult relationship as one of the impediments to effective humanitarian disaster response.

In 2010, ALNAP devoted its annual meeting to the role of national governments in international humanitarian response. In 2011, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the IFRC, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) convened an “International dialogue on Strengthening Partnership in Disaster Response”, with one of the main themes on bridging national and international support. The background papers and reports make for interesting reading (ALNAP 2010; Harvey and Harmer 2011).

The ALNAP meeting referred to four main roles and responsibilities of governments regarding humanitarian aid:

- they are responsible for ‘calling’ a crisis and inviting international aid
- they provide assistance and protection
- they are responsible for monitoring and coordinating external assistance
- they set the regulatory and legal framework governing relief assistance.

It acknowledged that, in practice, international relief effort had often been criticized for ignoring, sidelining or actively undermining local capacities, with the problems leading to tense and dysfunctional relationship between states and international agencies. Examples were brought forward from the response to the 2004 Asia Tsunami (Telford et al. 2006), in Indonesia (Willitts-King 2009), in Afghanistan (Ghani et al. 2005) and in the 2010 Haiti earthquake (Grunewald and Binder 2010), amongst others. Glaring problems included exclusion from humanitarian coordination and decision making, lack of use of local language or knowledge of local culture, influx of international personnel to displace local ones or create staffing vacuum in local structures, dual bureaucracy, and general lack of respect for the authority of those in the government. An IFRC survey (IFRC 2007)

¹¹ United Nation General Assembly Resolution 46/182 (1991) Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations. Annex para 5.

indicated that a high proportion of respondents reported that some international agencies failed to inform the authorities of their activities. A major evaluation of the clusters approach concluded that “clusters largely exclude national and local actors and often fail to link with, build on, or support existing coordination and response mechanisms” (Streets et al. 2010).

One of the best documented recent examples of the contentious relationship between a government and the international humanitarian community is the response to the 2010 Pakistan floods, in part thanks to reviews by both the international humanitarian community and the Government itself (NDMA 2011a, b; DARA 2011). Pakistan has developed a strong, though under-resourced, National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) following the 2005 Pakistan earthquake. As in most Asian countries, it also used military actors extensively as first responders and as part of the relief efforts. While the Pakistan Government was quick to appeal for international assistance, and the eventual Floods and Emergency Response Plan was the UN’s largest ever appeal, the Government was clear that it was in the lead. According to DARA,¹² there existed a “love-hate” relationship. Some key response decisions were made in ways which were not conducive to working relationships. In the Government’s view, the UN “overstepped their mandate” when OCHA advised the North Atlantic Treaty Organization not to establish an air bridge after the Government had invited it. OCHA insisted on a dozen clusters when the Pakistan Government wanted seven (in accordance with NDMA criteria). Separate UN appeal for conflict-displaced persons was launched initially against the will of the Government. In Punjab the UN opened a humanitarian hub in Multan rather than in the provincial capital of Lahore, thus creating a parallel structure. The transition between relief to recovery was substantially impacted by the Pakistan Government’s insistence that all recovery programs came under its purview.

Participants of both meetings noted that the existing literature seldom went beyond critique of aid agencies as undermining national capacities, and the discussion cautioned against knee-jerk or blame-driven changes that might “alienate humanitarian practitioners”. A more nuanced understanding of the dynamics between the two parties and a “re-appraisal” of the role(s) of the Government was deemed needed. Practical and systemic solutions proposed ranged from translation equipment for cluster leads, to regulation of influx of aid agencies, to a new model for appealing for assistance, and more. Harvey and Harmer (2011, p. 40) urged avoidance of “a confusing proliferation of solutions”.

A concluding statement in the ALNAP meeting report, however, is revealing,

The governments of many developing countries are becoming more assertive in wanting their sovereign primacy in responding to disaster to be respected and more capable in leading disaster responses. This does not mean that principled independent and neutral international humanitarian action is no longer needed, and substitution for the state will

¹²DARA is an independent international organization based in Spain that, amongst its activities, conducts humanitarian evaluations.

sometimes still be appropriate, particularly in situations of civil conflict. But international humanitarian agencies do need to be more consistent in fulfilling their stated commitments to encourage and support states to meet their responsibilities to assist and protect their own citizens. International agencies should more systematically assess state capacities, invest more in joint contingency planning with governments and link better with the disaster risk reduction agenda, which does recognize the primary role of governments in disaster risk management. The trend will be to move from delivering aid in ways that substitute for the state to supporting states to meet their own responsibilities and advocating for them to address gaps in response (ALNAP 2010, p. 30).

The conclusion acknowledges that States are “more capable”. Yet, when the first role attributed to governments is their responsibility “for ‘calling’ a crisis and inviting international aid”, one inevitably senses an assumption of the necessity of outside intervention. There is also a subtext that at once assumes the international community is in a better position to determine when such a “call” is needed, and a lack of confidence in the authorities. Indeed, the fundamental issue of mutual lack of trust and confidence was highlighted in the International Dialogue. It is not surprising that much of the discussion dealt with the issue of state authorities’ capacity, and “capacity building” as a way to bridge the authorities and international actors. There is a certain irony in the bulk of literature not going beyond critique of aid agencies undermining the authorities, when at the same time capacity building is seen as a way forward.

1.4 An Alternative View

While the sensitivities of governments on sovereignty are real and need to be acknowledged, the changing dynamics in the humanitarian world is not only about political prickliness. Neither should the perceived divide between the government and international humanitarian actors be seen only as a matter of who knows how to get the job done, and who does not (yet).

There is no doubt that the system created by the UN GA resolution 46/182, born of a desire to get more help to victims of disasters, has led to countless lives saved. It is also continuing to improve on its effectiveness. At the same time, there is increasing concern regarding the overall relevance and appropriateness of its efforts.

ALNAP’s 2012 *State of the Humanitarian System Report* recalled that out of six members of the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) recently hit by hydrological or meteorological disasters, none had requested Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) or flash financing through regular channels (ALNAP 2012, p. 69). The field surveys done for the Report (ALNAP 2012, p. 49) found that two-thirds of the respondents said that they were dissatisfied or only partly satisfied with the amount and quality of the overall package of assistance that they had received (from international responders.). The most common reasons cited in the evaluation synthesis for failing to meet community expectations were: inability to meet the

full spectrum of need, weak understanding of local context, inability to understand the changing nature of need, inadequate information-gathering techniques or an inflexible response approach.

Those who are counted as the traditional humanitarian implementers are increasingly finding that they could operate in crisis situations only through reliance on parties who are not the “core actors/implementers”. In the Cyclone Nargis response in Myanmar in 2008, UN agencies had to rely on the cover provided by ASEAN, through a tripartite government-UN–ASEAN coordination body. In the first year or so of the Syrian crisis, UN agencies and (a few) international NGOs operated solely through the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) Society. The SARC, until the current conflict erupted in Syria, was considered an extension of the Government. (In this crisis response, by all accounts, it has acted independently though.) Throughout 2012, humanitarian access in the border states of South Kordofan and Blue Nile between Sudan and south Sudan was negotiated, until it failed, under the auspices of the Tripartite Plan of Action sponsors—the United Nations, the African Union and the League of Arab States.

The humanitarian world is witnessing an upsurge in diversity of players who operate outside of their own domestic arena. Many include humanitarian objectives amongst their own multiple mandates. These could be the military, private sector companies, state-funded personnel and teams deployed outside domestic jurisdiction, non-governmental or quasi-governmental organizations which are funded by state-sponsored foundations, in addition to a proliferation of multiple mandated non-governmental organizations. Increasingly, regional political and economic organizations have developed humanitarian centres or departments for the coordination of the humanitarian efforts of their member states. Examples include ASEAN, the African Union and some of its regional commissions (e.g. ECOWAS and SADC), and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). They now operate in the same theatre as the traditional humanitarian implementers—United Nations agencies, the international NGOs, and the Red Cross Movement. The reach of some of these players can sometime exceed that of the traditional ones. For example, during the response to the Horn of Africa famine in Somalia in 2011, organizations coordinated under OIC had broader geographic reach in South and Central Somalia than those coordinated by the IASC.

In this rapidly changing landscape in the humanitarian world, where the previously dominant players are rubbing against those they perceive as “new-comers” or “emerging actors”, there is now increasing discussion and debate on the fundamental issues of what is the meaning of humanitarianism, who is a humanitarian actor, how to accommodate each other, and what should be the shape of the future humanitarian system (Labbe 2012; Davies 2012). In this context it is surprising that governmental authorities, with their material and personnel assets, are not

sufficiently acknowledged as “implementers” of response to disasters, either within their own border or outside.¹³ This is in addition to their primacy role as lead and coordinator of any disaster and humanitarian response, within their jurisdiction, whether involving international responder or not.

1.5 Civil Protection Multilateralism

For most of the two decades since the adoption of the UN GA Resolution 46/182, multilateral humanitarianism has been taken to refer to the make-up of the UN with its Inter-agency Standing Committee (IASC), including as partners OCHA, UN agencies, NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement. Yet UN GA Resolution 46/182 also called for a pooling of rapid disaster response capabilities of specialized personnel and technical specialists, including from Member States.¹⁴ In fact, there are currently three inter-locking multilateral networks that underpin international humanitarian cooperation (as distinguished from the multilateral inter-agency notion of international humanitarian assistance) in rapid-onset disasters. They are the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) system, the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) and the Global Disaster Alert and Coordination System (GDACS) supported by its on-line platform the Virtual On-Site Operations Coordination Centres (Virtual OSOCC). All have membership and participation involving a broad spectrum of country governments, regional organizations and international agencies/organizations, and all include active participation of civil protection personnel and assets.

The United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination concept was a direct response to the call of UN GA Resolution 46/182 (1991). It emerged in the aftermath of the 1988 Armenia Earthquake on the recommendation of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG). The international urban search and rescue community needed an internationally-accepted operational coordination system which could bring order to humanitarian response in the early hours and days following sudden onset natural disasters. INSARAG itself was established in 1991. It is a global network of now more than 80 countries and organizations under the United Nations umbrella. INSARAG deals with urban search and rescue

¹³ The lack of recognition is primarily an issue for the international humanitarian actors. It is seldom an issue within the countries’ own jurisdiction or by their national structures. The attachment to the humanitarian principles of independence and neutrality, for the international humanitarian actor, and the concern that they would not be respected in conflict situations by the authorities, might be a possible explanation.

¹⁴ “The United Nations should continue to make appropriate arrangements with interested Governments and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to enable it to have more expeditious access, when necessary, to their emergency relief capacities, including food reserves, emergency stockpiles and personnel, as well as logistic support.” UN GA Resolution 48/182 (1991) Annex para 28.

(USAR) related issues, aiming to establish minimum international standards for USAR teams and methodology for international coordination in earthquake response based on the INSARAG Guidelines endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 57/150 (2002), on “Strengthening the Effectiveness and Coordination of International Urban Search and Rescue Assistance”.

The United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) system was created in 1993. It was designed to help the United Nations and governments of disaster-affected countries during the first phase of a sudden-onset emergency, including assisting in the coordination of incoming international relief at national level and/or at the site of the emergency. UNDAC teams can deploy at short notice (12–48 h) anywhere in the world with core mission mandates of assessment, coordination and information management and are self-sufficient in personal and mission equipment. The UNDAC teams follow a pre-defined methodology based on the collective experience of sudden-onset disaster response from the full spectrum of emergency responders. The UNDAC methodology, captured in the UNDAC Handbook, is used extensively by many responders and governments as the basis of their own training. When responding to earthquakes, UNDAC teams set up and manage the On-Site Operations Coordination Centre (OSOCC) to help coordinate international Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams responding to the disaster. In the past decade, UNDAC Disaster Response Preparedness Missions have evolved to help disaster prone countries evaluate and improve their national disaster response plans.

In the beginning, UNDAC was supported by a few countries, with team members mostly from the field of urban search and rescue. Today, it consists of almost 255 team members from 79 countries, many of whom are members of G77, and 16 international, regional and non-governmental organizations. Team members are drawn from the full spectrum of humanitarian expertise, but they have also continued to come from the communities of first responders. Their deployments are supported by their home authorities and organizations. Many UNDAC members have domestic disaster management experience. Some have experience being deployed to neighbouring countries under mutual assistance agreement, or under the aegis of regional organizations.

The Global Disaster Alert and Coordination System (GDACS) is another cooperation framework under the United Nations umbrella (with the European Union). It includes disaster managers and disaster information systems worldwide and provides real-time access to web-based disaster information systems and related coordination tools. It aims at filling the information and coordination gap in real-time in the first phase after major disasters. It provides alerts and impact estimations after major disasters through a multi-hazard disaster impact assessment service, gained from scientific partnerships with global hazard monitoring organizations. Real-time coordination is provided through its “VirtualOSOCC” platform. The creation and dissemination of disaster maps, satellite images, and detailed

weather forecast and other related information are integrated automatically in VirtualOSOCC disaster discussions. Many governments and disaster response organizations rely on GDACS alerts and automatic impact estimations to plan international assistance. Some 14,000 disaster managers from governmental and non-governmental organizations have subscribed to the VirtualOSOCC and use the tool for information exchange and coordination in the first disaster phase. Many governments and organizations have formalized the use of GDACS tools and services in their national disaster response plans.

These humanitarian cooperation networks have been in existence for over 20 years, yet in the past decade, they are seldom mentioned in discussion on the international humanitarian system, despite periods of intense interest in the system's reform or effectiveness-strengthening efforts. A Humanitarian Policy Group/ODI (2011) Research Report on the role of networks in the humanitarian system did not mention them, even in its list of acronyms (Collinson 2011). These networks do not have a formalized role in the humanitarian inter-agency mechanisms. Yet they are significant operational partners and contributors to international humanitarian and emergency response. The parallelism between the inter-agency humanitarianism and multilateral civil protection is quite stark.

It has been noted that the past few years have seen a definite trend by all Governments, with almost no exception, to become actors in humanitarian cooperation (OCHA 2011),¹⁵ and wanting to be recognized as such. The trend has also led to a rapidly growing and active membership of these countries in the humanitarian cooperation networks, indicating a continuing support of multilateralism. Instead of “capacity building” as an approach, participants in the networks—be they Members States, intergovernmental organizations, NGOs or private sector entities—are:

- the drafters, not the addressees of norms
- the experts, not the recipients of expertise
- peers cooperating with each other, not “doctors curing their patients”, and
- the *actors*, not the recipients of assistance.

These humanitarian cooperation networks afford “a largely underestimated opportunity” for reaching out, for humanitarian advocacy and for building trust within the membership and partners in an international and multilateral forum (OCHA 2013).

¹⁵ It noted that “The increasing preference of developing countries to respond to disasters as much as possible using national capacities and to seek support, if necessary, only from neighbouring countries within their regions may have far-reaching implications for the international humanitarian system. If this trend continues, there is a possibility that international assistance may come to be considered as a last resort . . .”

1.6 Joining Forces, Not Parallelism: A Case Study¹⁶

The preparedness for, and response to, Typhoon Bopha in the Philippines in late 2012 illustrate the invaluable contribution of the humanitarian cooperation networks and their rapid response mechanisms.

OCHA has over many years worked closely with the Government of the Philippines in strengthening the national preparedness level to respond to disasters. Several large scale simulation exercises have been carried out with the goal of ensuring that the Government will be in the lead when a major disaster strikes. An UNDAC preparedness mission, requested by the President of the Philippines in 2005 and later follow-up missions became instrumental in the Government's efforts strengthening the national disaster management system. The Government of the Philippines was one of the first to adopt the cluster system into its own national disaster management structures. UNDAC members from the Philippines have taken an active role in UNDAC deployments in Asia, including during the Indian Ocean Tsunami, the cyclone Nargis in Myanmar and in nearly all UNDAC disaster preparedness missions in Asia since 2004. The trust created through this close cooperation was an important element when the Government of the Philippines agreed to let OCHA take an active role in the coordination of humanitarian efforts in support of displaced people in Mindanao.

At the request of the UN Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (UN RC/HC), and with the agreement of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) leadership, a nine-member UNDAC team was pre-deployed to Manila by 4 December, 2012 to support the response preparedness efforts of OCHA Philippines, the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), and the NDRRMC. The team members, with one exception, came from the Asia/Pacific region and included persons who were also members of the ASEAN Emergency Response and Assessment Team (ERAT).

The timely pre-deployment of the UNDAC team was achieved as a result of the real-time analysis (including on VirtualOSOCC¹⁷) of the weather system as it entered the Philippines. A dialogue took place between OCHA (Geneva Office, Philippines Country Office, Regional Office in Bangkok, New York Office) the UN HC/RC and the Government of the Philippines to discern potential scenarios of the cyclone path using different projection models. Typhoon Bopha made landfall on 4 December, 2012 at around 4.30 am.

Once on the ground, the UNDAC team played a key role providing direct support to OCHA-Philippines Country Office, the HCT with operating agencies

¹⁶ The author is grateful to the staff of Emergency Service Branch of Geneva Office, the Philippines Country Office and the Asia-Pacific Regional Office of OCHA for providing the case description.

¹⁷ OCHA and the UNDAC team provided real-time information on VirtualOSOCC. The emergency discussion was followed by emergency managers from 105 countries and organizations, 60 of whom were Governments.

under the IASC umbrella, and the Government of the Philippines in their own response efforts. This included supporting the inter-agency, Government-led needs assessment, supporting ongoing information management efforts during the preparedness and response phase, and working with the Government and HCT to establish coordination mechanisms, including the cluster system, in the affected areas.

Traditional thinking would applaud the close link between the government and multilateral system in this instance as illustrative of the importance of partnership-building with host governments for the calling for international assistance and for access.¹⁸ This would be too limiting a view. The Government of the Philippines was not just the host country; in this situation, it was the lead and a key implementer. The mutual trust was built through a humanitarian cooperation mechanism that is not steeped in the language of traditional humanitarian action—sovereignty, humanitarian principles or access—but aligned with the Government’s own civil protection mandate and orientation. UNDAC did not seek to supplement the capacity of the Government. Instead, it became a bridge between the Government and the international community.

1.7 The Future

OCHA recently hosted a policy forum on future policy and research needs, and its conclusion could be summed up in three words—people, technology and governments. Governments must be seen in their own rights as key actors in disaster and emergency preparedness and response, and are factored in, in the multi-actor humanitarian world of the future.

Humanitarian cooperation networks such as UNDAC, INSARAG and GDACS have been cast too narrowly as communities of technical experts, or as deployment mechanisms. Instead, in a multi-actor world, with states desiring to be active humanitarian actors, these networks should be more fully exploited as strategic tools for bridging the national and international/multilateral spheres. Their already wide membership provides an entry point for Governments and organizations weary of top-down, UN centric approaches, and helps foster commitment to multilateralism. They also provide government officials of these countries with a familiarity of language, methodology and culture that aligns with their own civil protection background. Traditional inter-agency humanitarian actors, might take comfort in the fact that these networks are under the United Nations umbrella and can trace their remit to United Nations General Assembly resolutions. They are served, or managed and coordinated, by OCHA, the coordinator of the IASC system. They also draw their membership from traditional donors and operating agencies. Cumulatively, these networks should and could help reach out and create

¹⁸ The typhoon-stricken area was in Mindanao, an area still considered to be under internal armed conflict.

new linkages. In so doing, they will help build trust between different parts of the international humanitarian system, which is of critical importance in times of emergency when there is no or little time to establish new relationship.

One might question whether this view of the future only applies to preparedness and response to natural disasters. UNDAC, INSARAG or GDACS are not activated during conflict situations. At the same time, it could be argued that the trust and good-will generated through a mutual affinity for civil protection in “peace time”, in regards to natural disasters, might make the authorities more willing to work with the international humanitarian community during times of strife. While this proposition still remains to be proven, if true, then an investment in these networks would be doubly positive.

A caveat often lurking in the background of any discussion of the role of governments is whether they could be trusted to provide principled humanitarian aid if they are a party to the conflict. In the multi-actor humanitarian world, where there is an increasing number of actors with multiple mandates and objectives in addition to humanitarian ones, there is now a vigorous debate on what constitutes “humanitarian action”, what should be the fundamental principles that guide it, and what purpose these principles serve. Within the theatre of conflicts, governments are already active players. They are involved, one way or another, in the delivery of aid, whether judged to be “humanitarian” or otherwise.¹⁹ In order to maximize the chances of someone caught in a humanitarian disaster receiving the help that is needed, it is incumbent on national and international arrangements to draw on the best combination of assets from all sources.

For too long, the parallelism between the civil protection and humanitarian worlds has precluded the necessary inclusiveness. More efforts should be made to foster understanding between the two worlds, and more efforts must be made to further develop these and future humanitarian cooperation networks to help bridge the two.

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¹⁹ In remarks to an International Peace Institute workshop on “the Future of Humanitarian Engagement in Complex Emergencies” (New York, April 2013), the author argued that humanitarian principles are there for the self-identification of the deliverers of aid, and should not be imposed as a requirement on others, or as an evaluative standard.

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