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Humanitarian
Policy Group

The role of networks in the international humanitarian system

Dr Sarah Collinson

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This report was prepared with the additional input of background reports by Ellen Martin in the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) and Ben Ramalingam and Kim Scriven in the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP).

About the authors

Dr Sarah Collinson is a Research Fellow in the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at the Overseas Development Institute. She leads HPG's work on humanitarian principles and politics and the international humanitarian system.

Ellen Martin is a Research Officer in the Humanitarian Policy Group at the Overseas Development Institute.

Ben Ramalingam is Head of Research and Development for the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP).

Kim Scriven is a Research and Innovations Officer for the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP).

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Humanitarian Policy Group
Overseas Development Institute
111 Westminster Bridge Road
London SE1 7JD
United Kingdom

Tel: +44(0) 20 7922 0300
Fax: +44(0) 20 7922 0399
Website: www.odi.org.uk/hpg
Email: hpgadmin@odi.org.uk

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Acronyms

ACHA	Africa Centre for Humanitarian Action
AADMER	Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (Myanmar)
ADRRN	Asia Disaster Reduction and Response Network
AIDMI	All India Disaster Mitigation Institute
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
BHF	Business Humanitarian Forum
CAP	Consolidated Appeals Process
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CHF	Common Humanitarian Fund
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
DARA	Development Assistance Research Associates
DEC	UK Disasters Emergency Committee
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DRN	Disaster Resource Network
DRR	Disaster risk reduction
ECB	Emergency Capacity Building Project
ECDF	East Coast Development Forum
ECHA	United Nations Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Aid
ERC	Emergency Relief Coordinator
ERF	Emergency Response Fund
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FTS	Financial Tracking Service
GHA	Global Humanitarian Assistance
GHD	Good Humanitarian Donorship
GHP	Global Humanitarian Platform
HAP	Humanitarian Action Plan
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
HPG	Humanitarian Policy Group
HPN	Humanitarian Practice Network
HRI	Humanitarian Relief Initiative

HRR	Humanitarian Response Review
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IDP	Internally displaced person
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
NDRRM	Natural Disaster Rapid Response Mechanism
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OFADDEC	L'Office Africain pour le Développement et la Coopération
PDR	Partnership for Disaster Response
POLR	Provider of Last Resort
PRDP	Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (northern Uganda)
RTE	Real-time evaluation
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SCHR	Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response
SDC	Swiss Development Cooperation
SDMC	SAARC Disaster Management Centre
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SSRC	Social Science Research Council
TCG	Tripartite Core Group (in relation to Myanmar)
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene (cluster)
WEF	World Economic Forum
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Executive summary

Recent decades have seen a significant expansion in the international humanitarian sector which has led to a significant expansion in the number and complexity of inter-organizational networks associated with humanitarian policy and programming. Networks are a crucial mechanism through which humanitarian actors' policies and programmes are guided and coordinated at all levels across the system. Yet there has been very little focused research or strategic analysis of the role of networks across the sector (Ramalingam, forthcoming 2010). The limited research that has been carried out has focused on the effectiveness and functions of particular networks, rather than exploring the role of networks in the governance and functions of the humanitarian system as a whole.

This study recognises that assessing the importance of networks depends not only on exploring how well individual networks function, but on how networks interact to influence particular and global humanitarian actions and outcomes. It describes the most significant networks in the sector, and analyses how networks affect the governance of humanitarian policy and practice across the system as a whole. The study is based principally upon a wide-ranging desk-based literature review and semi-structured interviews with representatives and experts from a range of organisations, including country-level interviews conducted in Sri Lanka, Sudan and Uganda in early 2010.

Overall, the international humanitarian system is distinguished by the limited extent to which national governments of crisis-affected countries exert direct authority within it at the international level. These governments and their state structures have remained largely remote from the governance of international humanitarian assistance beyond their own borders, although some are engaged formally (and to a greater or lesser extent in practice) in the governance of the key UN agencies through the UN General Assembly, the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the specialised agencies' own governance structures. Meanwhile, donor governments have not tried to develop an explicit regime of multilateral governance based on the kind of binding rules seen in many other areas of international cooperation. Thus, like the broader international development sector, the international humanitarian system is best seen as a partially self-regulating transnational community composed of various non-governmental, private and public governmental and intergovernmental actors.

Networks play a significant role in supporting, facilitating and structuring relationships and functions between the many diverse organisations within the system, resulting in complex, dispersed and often quite fluid patterns and dynamics of networks-based governance operating at different levels

across the sector. What is not yet well understood, however, is precisely how networks really affect governance dynamics and core functions of humanitarian action.

In practice, many different entities are referred to as networks across the aid sector, including professional or technical networks, knowledge-sharing networks, campaign networks, fundraising networks and operational networks. Some are relatively formal, with central secretariats and substantial resources, while others are very informal and transient, sometimes based on friendship or shared experiences on particular projects and programmes at a certain point in time.

This report reviews some of the key networks or types of network that play an important role in eight broad governance functions:

- Supporting policy-making and policy implementation.
- Supporting and facilitating policy verification and accountability.
- Enforcing binding rules
- Linking and resolving different issue areas and policy agendas.
- Setting norms and standards
- Mobilising resources.
- Direct support for humanitarian action and strategies on the ground.
- Developing usable knowledge and influencing policy and practice

Supporting policy-making and policy implementation

The power to determine and implement policies at the system-wide level is dispersed relatively horizontally among UN specialised agencies, the bigger international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and donors. This, plus the number and diversity of actors involved, contributes to the persistence of coordination and leadership challenges across the system. Such challenges are reflected in key policy-related networks within the humanitarian system, such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC).

While the IASC is acknowledged as one of the most influential global networks in setting policy and influencing change, it lacks clear authority within its own membership and includes inter-NGO networks that themselves lack authority over their own members. This limits its potential to make a tangible contribution to effective governance across the sector. The establishment of smaller sub-networks, such as the IASC Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) that are closer to the operational realities on the ground could be an important innovation, but the many challenges associated with network-

based governance will affect humanitarian governance at these levels as much as any other.

Although network-based governance processes are associated with instability, uncertainty and lack of progress in many areas, they can also help to ensure flexibility and diversity in humanitarian policy, and can help to shape and facilitate innovations. In addition, they have the potential to protect the impartiality and neutrality of humanitarian action by preventing the capture of the humanitarian system by powerful political actors or interests.

Supporting and facilitating policy verification and accountability

The self-regulating nature of networks and the complexities around the quality and control of information and knowledge pose major challenges to accountability within the humanitarian system. There are no overarching international structures or mechanisms responsible for scrutinising the performance of the system as a whole. The mixed and diverse objectives of humanitarian action pose additional problems in accounting for the system's effectiveness. There is no clearly demarcated public space at the transnational or global level where donorship or other strategic aspects of humanitarian assistance can be discussed or action taken in an open and participatory fashion.

The most important stakeholders in humanitarian aid – those needing humanitarian assistance – have little or no say in how aid is allocated, as they are not part of the electorate of donor governments. International civil society networks have, therefore, an important (albeit largely proxy) role to play in public scrutiny of donors and the wider system, and in representing these primary stakeholders.

Accountability has been a growth industry within the humanitarian system over the past two decades, driven by the system's networks. This is reflected in the number of knowledge networks and initiatives focused on accountability, including Sphere, the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), GHD, the Humanitarian Response Index (HRI) managed by Development Assistance Research Associates (DARA), the Emergency Capacity Building Project (ECB), peer reviews by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and evaluations by the UK Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC). Most of these initiatives are concerned with improving quality and performance in the disbursement of humanitarian aid or the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Yet none of them have created strong or explicit mechanisms for monitoring or enforcing compliance among network members.

Enforcing binding rules

Without authority to enforce compliance with international humanitarian or human rights law, the engagement of humanitarian networks in enforcement activities is largely limited to advocacy directed at national governments,

belligerents and other duty-bearers. In many contexts, networks can provide a structure and conduit for information-sharing, reporting and joint advocacy that would be beyond the scope of individual organisations. *Ad hoc* policy, advocacy and operational networks at the country or field level can also provide an informal forum for mainstream humanitarian actors to share information or present evidence to governments or other important actors outside the system whose actions can affect humanitarian space or humanitarian outcomes. More formal networks may also be important fora for seeking the compliance of a government or key non-state actor with national laws and international obligations around human rights, refugee and humanitarian action.

Linking and resolving different issue areas and policy agendas

In many respects, the international humanitarian system is a relatively closed 'club', defined broadly by shared humanitarian values. Yet it is also rife with contending and competing coalitions of specific sub-interests, each supported by networks of various kinds that are underpinned by competing values, beliefs and 'knowledge'. Different values and beliefs are most obvious *between* networks, not least in contexts and policy areas where the humanitarian agenda overlaps with competing international agendas, such as recovery and development, stabilisation, counter-insurgency, peacekeeping and state-building. Policy networks can converge or collide as issues overlap or merge, leading to uncharted and perhaps uneasy relationships among key actors linked into different networks.

The UN's Integration Steering Group – created specifically to help ensure implementation and progress on issues related to integration – represents an explicit attempt, through the creation of a new network, to address disconnects between the different network-based knowledge cultures among various parts of the UN that are now formally committed to working together within new integrated structures (including humanitarian, development, political and peacekeeping).

Setting norms and standards

The national and international legal context in which international humanitarian action takes place is complex. Although affected in fundamental ways by these overlapping legal regimes and their application (or not) by states and other actors in different contexts of humanitarian action, there is no clear body of international law that relates specifically to the supply side in the delivery of humanitarian assistance. To the extent that the international humanitarian *aid* system is supported by normative frameworks at the international level, these are primarily sets of *ad hoc* principles and standards that have emerged out of specific and, arguably (given that they have no formal international legal status), equally *ad hoc* policy networks.

All the major policy networks in the international humanitarian system have played a role in establishing norms and standards for the core system members. Since it was established in the

early 1990s, the IASC has issued several policy statements, guidelines, and manuals that help to set the normative frameworks, common standards and good practice for the humanitarian community. The GHD initiative has sought to reaffirm the centrality of the core humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence in the financing of humanitarian assistance. The Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR) founded the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in disaster relief. In practice, however, the general wording of the principles has often led to highly varied interpretations of their practical meaning and weak linkage between the principles themselves and action on the ground. In addition, new networks with competing priorities and underlying principles – such as those relating to conflict sensitivity and ‘do no harm’ ambitions, human rights advocacy, longer-term development programming, risk management and staff security – have further complicated and sometimes obstructed the application of these principles in practice.

Mobilising resources

Resource-related networks are the collectives of actors who jointly support the resourcing and disbursement of humanitarian financing. They are highly varied, reflecting the diversity of sources and channels of funding and associated mechanisms within the humanitarian system. They include headquarters-level NGO networks that seek and channel donations from individuals, such as the UK’s Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC). Such networks are complemented in most donor countries by countless informal networks, some very local and short-lived, through which individuals give money to specific organisations that are responding to particular emergencies. Sometimes these funds enter the more established funding networks such as the DEC, but unknown levels of private funds are also collected and disbursed through networks in donor countries that have no recognised status within the humanitarian system, including through many religious and diaspora-supported networks.

On official humanitarian financing, there are networks at the headquarters level dedicated to supporting the pooled resourcing and disbursement mechanisms of donor government funding. The CERF Partnership Taskforce, for example, was established in 2007 to review procedures for CERF partnership arrangements between UN agencies and implementing partners and includes representation from a number of INGOs and UN agencies.

Resource networks interact closely with other key types of networks, particularly policy, operational and information networks. The IASC, for example, plays a key role in defining the appropriate criteria to guide CERF allocations on the ground. The GHD network can also play an indirect supporting role by underpinning the stated commitments of donors to provide adequate, predictable, flexible and impartial humanitarian funding.

Where there is tension or potential tension between resource networks or mechanisms, the key policy networks have addressed these by creating new resource-focused networks or network-based initiatives. In 2009, for instance, the IASC proposed the creation of an IASC Group on Humanitarian Financing with a remit to scrutinize the pooled funds and broader humanitarian financing issues, to work to strengthen financial tracking, and to provide a forum for information-sharing and inter-agency dialogue on policy issues related to financing.

New resource-related networks have started to be developed by ‘non-DAC’ humanitarian donors, including the Gulf States. Yet, beyond outreach initiatives by established networks within the international humanitarian system, such as GHD and the donor support group of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the potential for strong multilateral networks to develop among new and emerging donors may be constrained by different strategic priorities and preferences to provide direct bilateral, government-to-government assistance to affected states.

Direct support for humanitarian assistance and strategies on the ground: Clusters

Clusters have become a dominant type of network for the direct support to, and coordination of, humanitarian operations at country level. Although the clusters are credited with some important improvements in coordination and leadership in many contexts, a number of challenges remain, many of which are related to the networks-based governance of the clusters and their roll-out. Strengthening IASC procedures for setting up the cluster approach in major new emergencies, for example, has presented numerous challenges, including clarifying the different roles and responsibilities of different agencies. NGOs’ participation in the clusters is voluntary and, in practice, is highly variable across different organisations, reflecting the varying human and other resources that agencies have available or choose to devote to participation. Inter-cluster coordination – which again depends to a great extent on voluntary network-based forms of cooperation and communication – has proved a huge challenge in many contexts.

Direct support for humanitarian assistance and strategies on the ground: private sector networks

Many fora have emerged in recent years that are devoted to expanding or supporting the role of the private sector in humanitarian response. Natural disasters such as the Indian Ocean Tsunami and the Haiti earthquake, as well as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, have highlighted the level of engagement of corporate actors in humanitarian action – as donors, as for-profit contractors and as ‘partners’. The level of interest in channelling commercial sector support for humanitarian action has grown markedly. Agencies are tapping into the human, material, technical and financial resources of commercial companies, and greater awareness within the private sector of the value of responding to humanitarian crises, both for business and moral reasons, has

meant greater willingness of for-profit companies to provide in-kind and financial assistance to humanitarian agencies or to expand their activities into humanitarian operations on the ground (Wheeler & Graves, 2008).

New network-based or network-building initiatives have emerged to coordinate humanitarian assistance among businesses as well as between business and humanitarian agencies. The World Economic Forum (WEF), for instance, is viewed by some as a potential facilitator and ‘filter’ to manage public–private partnerships among the clusters, including in identifying needs and in connecting it to other initiatives such as the UN Global Compact. The Business Humanitarian Forum (BHF), formed in 1999, is a network of private sector, humanitarian and other non-profit actors that aims to identify and bridge the gaps of understanding between humanitarian agencies and the private sector and promote collaboration between the two.

Networks connected with private sector engagement in humanitarian relief cut across a great number of different types of humanitarian networks and functions, ranging from resourcing to technical knowledge and information, operational networks and policy. However, many of these networks are relatively *ad hoc* or rapidly evolving in nature and do not connect directly with the ‘mainstream’ international humanitarian system (in terms of membership, participation or inter-network links): lack of information or knowledge about them makes it very difficult to reach any general picture of their significance for humanitarian action and governance.

Direct support for humanitarian assistance and strategies on the ground: Southern and regional networks

The ‘regional and Southern-based’ networks reviewed for this study include two distinct and important types: (i) ‘regional capacity builders and emerging policy influencers’, which may use the reputation and relationships of a host NGO to strengthen network ambitions; and (ii) ‘national response capacity’ networks, which may emerge in an emergency to take on specific response roles and meet the needs of specific groups.

Information on Southern and regional networks is relatively scarce, and may reflect the general weakness of genuine North–South partnership in humanitarian action. A project led by ALNAP, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) and other global networks collaborating to strengthen regional networks is one of the few international initiatives targeted specifically at such bodies.

Nevertheless, the available information suggests that preliminary and tentative insights are possible on the potential functions, resourcing and future contributions of these networks and their scope for development. Where they have proximity and sustained engagement with those living with vulnerability and with national and regional actors, and where their humanitarian role is not negatively affected by

extreme or competing political pressures,¹ Southern and regional networks might have a distinctive comparative advantage within broader humanitarian responses. They have the potential to be more sensitised to the local context and harness local resources and capacities. Given the continual weakness of the international humanitarian system to respond sensitively to issues of local context and capacities, such networks may bring a valuable and often missing element to the work of the ‘mainstream’ system.

Developing usable knowledge and influencing policy and practice

Information and knowledge flows are vital across the humanitarian system, helping to inform and strengthen operational response and technical expertise, to support humanitarian policy and advocacy, to mobilise and allocate resources, and to promote and strengthen the accountability of both humanitarian agencies and donors. Such flows involve shifting patterns of relationships between individuals, teams and networks that collect information and produce knowledge and ideas, that shape policy and organisational strategies, and that apply information, knowledge and ideas in an operational context. While there are some networks set up with the explicit and apparently straightforward goal of sharing and disseminating knowledge and information (e.g. AlertNet and IRIN), knowledge and information is rarely disconnected from some aspect of underlying networks-based governance in the humanitarian system, such as norm diffusion, consensus-building, community-building, the establishment or re-evaluation of actors’ goals, or the assessment, adjustment or improvement of policy and practice in a particular area.

New information technologies allow many different types of information and knowledge to be shared, managed and filtered with increasing ease and at ever lower cost, enabling the kind of decentralised, non-hierarchical network-based action that is so often needed to respond quickly and flexibly to humanitarian crises. But the combined ease and complexity of information and knowledge flows through network-based transnational relations are significant challenges for some of the major organisations and networks in the humanitarian system. As knowledge networks become denser, faster and more sophisticated, they place greater demands on policy and operational actors and networks within the system, and risk making it more difficult for policy-makers and practitioners to control, structure and use knowledge and information effectively.

A variety of specialised teams and networks of ‘knowledge experts’ in think tanks, dispersed expert networks and consultancy firms interact closely with, or participate in, other key networks within the humanitarian system to influence policy and implementation processes at many levels. These teams and networks interact in fluid and shifting sub-networks

¹ The question of how the role of national networks can be affected by domestic political pressures in highly contested or conflict-affected political environments will be explored in the follow-up draft through the field-based research conducted in February and March 2010.

of varying formality, duration and development, sometimes responding to contractual opportunities associated with the policy agendas of key humanitarian actors, or sometimes actively shaping these. Many involve groups of collaborating agencies and/or donors working on specific policy or operational problems or innovations. All the major international networks and organisations involved in humanitarian policy and action – including donors, UN agencies, NGOs and the Red Cross / Red Crescent organisations – rely on these expert knowledge networks to support their assistance and strategies on the ground, to monitor and analyse changing humanitarian needs and the contexts in which they are operating, to link and resolve different policy issues, and to monitor and assess their own performance. But key policy and operational networks also play a direct role themselves in creating and sharing knowledge and information, and influencing policy agendas and approaches to action on the ground.

Informal networks and networking are essential for information and knowledge flows among humanitarian actors. In practice, it is entirely possible that informal or low-profile information networks play a more important role than formal networks in informing certain strategies and action. For example, information networking to guide actors in negotiating humanitarian access is highly sensitive and needs to be responsive to changing local political and other developments in ways that may not be possible for the more formal or public information networks.

Monitoring remains a key weakness across the system (ALNAP, 2010, citing Beck, 2003). Dedicated network-based innovations to address this problem include the creation of a UN Interest Group on Real-Time Evaluations (RTEs) which has a mandate to make RTEs a standard undertaking. Other positive new initiatives in particular sectors were also noted, such as Valid International's

newly developed continuous monitoring approach for nutrition projects (SQUEAK), with coverage seen as the key determinant for success (ALNAP, 2010). By establishing a platform for joint needs assessments, improved information management, common planning processes and more effective monitoring mechanisms, the cluster approach is also credited with improving monitoring, helping to better identify gaps, reducing duplication and improving geographic and programmatic coverage, as well as strategic planning and prioritisation.

Considerable challenges remain, however. A recurrent theme in the humanitarian literature is a concern that international agencies – and, by extension – their networks do not invest sufficiently in broader analysis of the contexts in which they work, beyond somewhat mechanical monitoring of project-related outputs (ALNAP, 2010). The disconnect between current aid practice and an increasingly sophisticated knowledge industry focused on fragile states points to the likely significance of institutional impediments to mainstreaming context analysis. These may result from organisational and resourcing structures, cultures of practice, and incentive and governance systems within aid organisations and the wider aid industry. The problem may be exacerbated by competing cultures, networks and communities of knowledge associated with different programming and policy areas.

In complex environments, knowledge and information are rarely value-neutral: there is always huge potential for conflict, competition and contradiction in the sources and use of knowledge and within and between the many networks through which information and analysis are collected, processed and used by humanitarian actors. Yet there have been positive innovations recently in the development and application of context analysis tools through a number of informal and emergent networks that link researchers and practitioners.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The past two decades witnessed a huge expansion in the international humanitarian sector in terms of the financial resources and numbers and variety of organizations involved, and in terms of the global reach of humanitarian action. With this has come a significant expansion in the number and complexity of inter-organizational networks associated with humanitarian policy and programming, with networks now representing a crucial mechanism through which humanitarian actors' policies and programmes are guided and coordinated at all levels across the system. This is reflected in the dominance and influence of a number of high-profile and established global networks, including:

- Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)
- Global Humanitarian Platform (GHP)
- Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative (GHD)
- Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR)
- Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance of Humanitarian Action (ALNAP)
- International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)
- InterAction
- Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN)
- Sphere Initiative.

At the operational level, the UN-led cluster approach is creating new practice-oriented networks linking different humanitarian actors working within particular sectors and particular countries.

Despite the ubiquity of networks in the overall structure and functioning of the humanitarian system, there has been very little focused research or strategic analysis of their role or significance across the sector. What research there has been has tended to be limited to assessing or evaluating the effectiveness and functions of particular networks (Ramalingam, forthcoming 2010). In addition to describing some of the most important networks in the international humanitarian system, this study seeks to explore the significance of these networks for the governance of specific aspects of humanitarian policy

and practice across the system and for the governance of the system more broadly.

This involves looking at how networks affect policy, programming, resourcing, and associated flows of information and knowledge. The study considers the principal types of formal and informal networks linking different types of humanitarian actors, what different functions these networks play in humanitarian policy and programming at different levels (global, regional, national, sectoral, local), and how the dominant humanitarian networks are related to each other. While exploring these questions, the review also points to significant networks that may be overlooked or remain marginal from the 'mainstream' system, and to the interactions of humanitarian networks with other key international policy regimes, such as those associated with civil-military relations, reconstruction, development, disaster risk reduction (DRR), social protection and peace-building.²

The commentary and analysis contained in this draft is based upon a wide-ranging desk-based literature review and approximately eighty semi-structured interviews with representatives and experts of a range of organizations from across the sector from global / headquarters down to country and field levels (international humanitarian and development donors, UN agencies, national and international NGOs, Red Cross / Red Crescent movement, civil society organisations and national research institutes). The country-level interview research included key informant interviews conducted in Uganda, Sri Lanka and Sudan in early 2010, complemented by semi-structured telephone interviews. In addition, the study has drawn on related interview research conducted by HPG researchers during 2008 and 2009 focused on challenges in humanitarian reform, the application of Good Humanitarian Donorship principles, the role of private sector actors and networks in humanitarian assistance, and work led by ALNAP on supporting Southern and regional humanitarian networks.

² While it has not been possible to explore these interactions in detail within this study, these deserve further exploration.

Chapter 2

The significance of networks across the humanitarian system

Overall, the international humanitarian system is distinguished by the limited extent to which national governments exercise direct or explicit authority over it. Indeed, the contemporary ‘system’ has developed partly in response to the inability or unwillingness of many states to fulfill their responsibilities to protect and assist their citizens, and in response Western donors’ shifting their humanitarian funding out of affected government or state channels that are considered too weak, corrupt or politically dominated to manage large volumes of humanitarian aid on an impartial and accountable basis. Affected governments and state structures have remained fairly remote from the broader governance of international humanitarian assistance beyond their own national borders: official international humanitarian aid and assistance, financed principally by Western donor governments, is now channelled and implemented almost exclusively through UN agencies, international NGOs and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, rather than through affected state institutions or regional organizations (Harvey, 2009). While many affected governments do play a formal and sometimes significant practical role in the governance of key UN organizations within the system through the UN General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the governance structures of the individual agencies themselves, such as the UNHCR’s Executive Committee, they have generally not sought to exert broader direct influence or involvement in governance across the system on a level comparable with what has been seen in other related areas of transnational governance, such as human rights and international peacekeeping.

Donor agencies are among the most influential actors within the system. Yet, reflecting the relatively small volumes and low international strategic importance of humanitarian aid, the major donor governments have not sought to develop an explicit rules-based regime of multilateral governance of the kind seen in many other areas of international cooperation, such as trade, peace enforcement or arms control. Particular regional and international rule-based regimes, such as those relating to international refugee protection, human rights and humanitarian law, and numerous UN Security Council Resolutions intersect with it and create certain structures and legal constraints that govern particular aspects of humanitarian action, but these do not establish a distinct or coherent normative regime for the sector as a whole. Donor governments exert indirect influence by controlling the direction and purposes of substantial financial flows, and, increasingly, through the pressures they can bring to bear over the priorities of UN missions in many crisis-affected countries, especially those with integrated missions. At the same

time, however, internal departmental pressures to reducing head-count and direct transaction costs, combined with pressures from within the wider humanitarian system to reduce the influence of foreign policy and other political interests over humanitarian aid, has encouraged many to reduce their direct involvement in the governance of many aspects of humanitarian assistance. Consequently, core areas of humanitarian governance, including disbursement of funds and coordination of responses, have been at least partially delegated to the UN and other transnational actors and networks. Donors have promoted sector-wide reforms and sought to shape evolving humanitarian policy agendas, but have not deliberately created new structures to enable them to exercise explicit control or authority over the system as a whole.

The international humanitarian system is therefore best understood or depicted as a partially self-regulating transnational community in which ‘contacts, coalitions, and interactions across state boundaries [...] are not controlled by the central foreign policy organs of governments’ (Keohane and Nye, 1971). ALNAP’s recently published *State of the Humanitarian System* observes that to term the huge diversity of actors and networks involved in humanitarian action a ‘system’ ‘risks implying a degree of cohesion and uniformity of objectives that simply is not the case’ (ALNAP, 2010). Nevertheless, ‘by virtue of their shared broad goals and underlying values, and their interdependence in field operations, there is a very real sense in which international humanitarian actors and their national counterparts involved in disaster management do comprise a system — albeit a loosely configured one — that is worthy as a unit of analysis’ (ALNAP, 2010).

Dobusch and Quack (2008) observe how, in self-regulating transnational communities of this kind, ‘various private and public actors concerned with a particular type of transnational activity come together’, often in ‘non-structured and rather unformalized settings, to elaborate and agree on collective rules of the game’. The process is one of ‘voluntary and relatively informal negotiation; the emerging structural arrangements are relatively amorphous, fluid, and multifocal in nature’, with a high degree of reliance on ‘voluntary compliance and socialization of the members into a common cognitive and normative framework’. Networks of many different kinds play a very significant role in supporting, facilitating and structuring relationships and mutual or connected functions between the many diverse organizations within the system, resulting in complex, dispersed and often relatively fluid patterns and dynamics of networks-based governance operating at different levels across the sector.

The absence from the dominant humanitarian networks of significant ‘non-system’ actors that may be directly involved in humanitarian responses – such as military and armed forces, the private sector, and ‘non-DAC’ bilateral donors – reflects how networks themselves reinforce and support existing definitions and internally recognized boundaries of the system (Collinson, Elhawary and Muggah, forthcoming 2010). In most humanitarian crises, the first wave of response and often the most important assistance is undertaken by local and national organizations, institutions and associated networks, such as family and community-based organisations (see, for instance, Hillhorst, 2003; Tsunami Evaluation Coalition, 2006), but these institutions generally fall outside the boundaries what is usually seen as the international humanitarian system (see Annex 1).

As Ramalingam observes, many different entities are referred to as networks across the aid sector, including professional or technical networks, knowledge-sharing networks, campaign networks, fundraising networks, operational networks; some are relatively formalized, perhaps with a central secretariat and controlling substantial resources, others highly informal networks based on friendship or shared experiences on particular projects and programmes (Ramalingam, forthcoming 2010). To a large extent, networks are defined as much by what they are not as by what they are. As already noted, global or transnational networks can be distinguished from the formal intergovernmental regime structures that govern much of formal international relations. Networks are not single entities like organisations, nor are they the sum of all their members aggregated together; approaches that treat networks as organisations are likely to miss a lot of what networks actually do (*ibid.*). Networks are actor-based, hence they must also be distinguished from policy instruments or mechanisms, such as funding mechanisms or institutions. It is not the instruments themselves, but the coalescence of actors and how they relate to one another in connection with particular instruments, mechanisms or objectives that comprise networks. Networks have the potential to pull diverse groups and resources together, including government or public sector, specialised non-governmental agencies, multilateral actors, affected communities, and private sector, military or other actors from outside the core system. Table 1 highlights a spectrum of institutional formations between ‘ideal type’ networks and organizations; it should be noted,

however, that many network institutions fall somewhere between these two ideal types.

Recent work on aid networks by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) provides a pragmatic definition of networks as ‘self-governing structures that help diverse actors work together to reach their goals in a cooperative manner’ (Ramalingam *et al.*: 2008 p.1). Formal networks can be distinguished from informal network activities in that they may display some or all of the following features:

- Some sense of the network as an entity, either through articles of association or network agreements.
- A clearly stated focus on a specific substantive set of issues and/or regions.
- Articulated common goals and interests.
- Regular communication processes and tangible knowledge products.
- Some centralised or decentralised coordination mechanism (secretariat, managing committee).
- A common workplan and, in some cases, operational budgets.
- Formalised membership structures (individuals, projects, programmes, organisations, research institutions).

Whereas much of the literature relating to networks in the aid industry has focused on analyzing the governance and other functions of particular or types of formal networks from the point of view of better understanding or supporting the networks themselves (e.g. ODI’s ‘Networks Functions Approach’ – see Annex 2), this review approaches the question from the opposite side of the lens, as it were, to explore what functions *various* networks (both formal and informal) play *both separately and together* in the governance of the overall humanitarian system.

It is difficult to force networks into any rigid typology given their diversity within the system, the dynamic way in which they typically evolve as actors and respond and react to new emergencies, and changing circumstances or shifting objectives. Indeed, the very nature of networks is likely to make this a highly elusive goal (Reinicke *et al.*, 2000). Yet, as discussed in the following section, to the extent that a loose typology is useful to make sense of this diversity, one that focuses on the governance functions of networks is likely to be instructive.

Table 1: The Network-Organisation Spectrum (from Ramalingam, 2011; adapted from Taschereau and Bolger, 2007)

Networks	←————→	Organisations
<p>Networks are constituted through voluntary association of individuals and/or organisations to advance an issue or purpose.</p> <p>Members join, participate in, or leave a network based on their perception of its added value: exchange of knowledge or practices, increased capacity to effect change, etc. The relationship among members is fundamentally a social contract.</p>	←————→	<p>Organisations are mandated by a governing body, shareholders or members to achieve organisational goals and objectives.</p> <p>Employees and managers may value the organisation's goals and objectives, but the contractual relationship is fundamentally legal and/or financially based.</p>
<p>Negotiated order and reciprocal accountability. Members share their ideas and engage in joint action to the extent they trust others will reciprocate. Participation is 'at the core' is a distinctive feature of a network</p>	←————→	<p>Hierarchical order and accountability to executives, boards of governors and shareholders, ministers, etc., is a key feature of organisations. Authority for decision making and accountability ultimately rests at the top.</p>
<p>Networks are fluid and organic – they emerge, grow and adapt to achieve their purpose, to respond to members' needs and to opportunities and challenges in their environment. Their trajectories and results are not easily predictable.</p>	←————→	<p>Organisations have codified functions and roles, and routinised practices that allow them to deliver products and services with a relatively high level of predictability.</p>
<p>Informal structuring of relationships among network members is as important, if not more so than formal structure. It is facilitated through information exchange, creation of common spaces to share knowledge and experience (workshops, conferences, websites), joint project work, etc.</p>	←————→	<p>Formal organisational structuring of work is important in organisations, and much time is devoted to getting the structure right.</p>
<p>Structure usually involves different levels and types of membership. While member interactions are self-organising to a certain extent in successful networks, most also require a coordinator or secretariat, however small.</p>	←————→	<p>Structure usually combines three main components: a strategic apex, core operations and administrative support.</p>

Chapter 3

The governance roles of networks

The term “governance” implies a focus on the authoritative allocation of resources and exercise of control in which the state or government is not necessarily the only or most important actor (Rhodes 1996: 653; Bulkeley and Betsill 2003: 9; quoted in Andonova et al., 2007). The context and nature of governance in relation to many international issue-areas has shifted progressively ‘from a command-and-control style of public administration to a more complex networked style of shared decision-making and leadership’ (Willard and Creech, 2008). As described by Andonova et al. (2007), transnational governance occurs when networks operating in the transnational political sphere purposively steer constituent members or populations to act; it represents an increasingly dense and diverse layer of governance, ‘which can be compared to a transmission belt, linking governance systems from the global to the local, as well as across the public and private spheres’. It includes numerous activities that are significant for establishing international rules and shaping policy through ‘on-the-ground’ implementation.

The complexity of network-based transnational governance opens the space for numerous autonomous actors and different and competing ideas and principles to compete for leverage in governance processes at both domestic and international levels. Thus significant actors and networks exercising influence over key governance processes are not restricted to those with formal authority; they extend to UN and other multilateral organizations, NGOs, civil society organisations and global social movements, transnational networks of researchers, expert analysts, advisers and commentators, private sectors organisations, multinational corporations and other forms of private authority (Okereke et al., 2008). Betsill and Bulkeley argue that transnational networks pose serious challenges to ‘traditional analytical divisions between international and domestic politics, between local, national and global scales, and between states and non-state actors (reference; *ibid.*)’.

International humanitarian action has a number of attributes that make networked forms of governance potentially relevant (adapted from Andonova et al., 2007):

- It is characterized by a relatively strong presence of non-state actors with capacity for action and an interest in and capacity for governance.
- It is also characterized by a great degree of complexity and need for coordination of policies vertically as well as horizontally.
- It has to involve multiple sectors often with divergent interests and roles. Actors within the system rarely try to tackle the issue in its entire complexity, but tend to focus instead on a narrower set of governance objectives within

the larger picture of humanitarian governance.

- It provides opportunities for issue-specific cross-border cooperation among actors focused on similar aspects of the issue.
- The nature of the legal and normative regimes that intersect with international humanitarian action, including those relating to the protection of refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), children and civilians, create specific frameworks, mechanisms and opportunities that necessitate transnational governance, through, for example, the protection mandates of the UN specialised agencies concerned and the unique mandate of the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross).

What is not yet well understood, however, is the how networks affect governance dynamics in practice. The extent to which effective governance within the system is supported by key policy and operational networks depends on a number of factors:

- Do the networks in question explicitly focus on governance issues at a system-wide or cross-organisational level?
- Do the networks have a mandate, provided for by members, to act on their behalf in order to ‘exercise control and co-ordination’?
- Do the members of the network give up autonomy, in terms of policy and operations, in deference to the cooperative consensus established by means of the network in question?
- Do the various networks that make up the system add up to more than the sum of the parts – i.e. how effective are they in combination?
- Are networks assessed – individually or collectively – in terms of their contribution to the broader effectiveness of the system?

The governance functions that networks may perform within the humanitarian sector include:

- Supporting policy-making and policy implementation.
- Supporting and facilitating policy verification and accountability.
- Linking and resolving different issue areas and policy agendas.
- Seeking duty-bearers’ respect for binding rules.
- Mobilising resources.
- Setting rules, norms and standards for operational response.
- Directly supporting humanitarian action and strategies on the ground.
- Agenda setting and developing usable knowledge.

Table 2 (opposite) sets out a loose typology to illustrate some of these key functions. It needs to be stressed, however, that many networks perform multiple functions across and within these broad categories. Some networks are established with explicit objectives connected to one or more of these functions, while others, including informal networks, perform key functions without this being an expressed aim, sometimes unintentionally, or often because the network itself does not have a clearly recognised network identity associated with a particular governance objective or function.

3.1 Supporting policy-making and policy implementation

There is considerable ambiguity and instability in the governance of the humanitarian system which is brought about by the multiplicity of actors and agendas within it. While, to a large extent, ‘money always talks’, power to determine and implement policies at the system-wide level is nevertheless dispersed relatively horizontally among UN specialised agencies, the bigger INGOs and donors. It is no great surprise, therefore, that coordination and leadership within and across the international humanitarian system remains a perennial problem and a continuing preoccupation of the major humanitarian policy networks. This is clearly reflected in key policy-related networks within the humanitarian system, including the IASC, the clusters, and the GHD initiative.

The IASC was established in 1992 in response to General Assembly Resolution 46/182, calling for strengthened coordination of humanitarian assistance. The IASC is a unique inter-agency forum for humanitarian dialogue and decision-making, involving a range of UN and non-UN humanitarian partners. Under the leadership of the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), the primary role of the IASC is to shape humanitarian policy as well as to ensure coordinated and effective humanitarian response. Meanwhile, the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA) was created by the Secretary-General in the framework of UN reform with the aim of enhancing the coordination between UN agencies in various humanitarian sectors. Chaired by the ERC (USG), the Committee is composed of the highest-level UN executives and meets regularly to consider UN humanitarian policy and operational matters, incorporating political, peacekeeping and security issues into the discussions. The ECHA is less developed and less transparent than the IASC, and meets less regularly.

In terms of governance structure, the IASC can be seen as an overarching network of subsidiary networks. This is reflected in the internal structure of the IASC itself, from the Principals and Working Group, to numerous thematic Sub-Working Groups, Task Forces, Reference Groups, Contact Groups, Core Groups and so on. At a very general level, the hierarchy between these networks and the particular functions with which each is tasked serves as a kind of proxy for the more conventional directive form of hierarchical governance found

in domestic government and certain areas of rule-based international governance based on clearer inter-governmental agreement and leadership (e.g. within the EU or NATO). Yet the network-based nature of policy-making is entirely different, not least in terms of defining its own remit and responsibilities. A 2003 independent review of the IASC and its effectiveness (Jones and Stoddard, 2003) notes that the IASC shares no common definition of humanitarianism or of what constitutes humanitarian action. This, the review specifies, reflects differences within the membership itself, such as between protection agencies and operational humanitarian actors, and between US and European NGOs. Unsurprisingly, this situation ‘complicates the work of the IASC in important ways’, as it makes it difficult to draw boundaries around its work and has impeded the establishment of clear criteria for membership or participation (*ibid.*). Overall, the IASC lacks clear or unambiguous authority within its own membership (and includes inter-NGO networks that themselves lack authority over members), and in the broader arena of humanitarian action which involves so many other types of actors that have no representation within the IASC, it has very little authority or recognition. The fact that national NGOs are hardly represented within the membership remains a considerable obstacle to the vertical (global to local) integration of key humanitarian actors. This substantially limits its potential to contribute tangibly to effective governance across the sector.

Meanwhile, the horizontal integration of key humanitarian actors into top-level humanitarian policy-making and decision-making is significantly impeded by the fact that donors cannot be included in the IASC membership. While the lack of sustained and strategic interaction with donors at a policy level produces important disconnects in strategic-level humanitarian policy-making, the IASC’s Reference Groups and Task Forces do sometimes take advantage of flexible participation to bring in donors and other outside organisations. At the country level, variable and informal network-based relations among UN agencies, NGOs and donors plays an important role in bringing these actors together to share, formulate and agree on key issues of humanitarian policy (*ibid.*).

The primary management challenges for the IASC identified by the 2003 review reflect the difficulty of leading and formulating policy on the basis of consensus-based network relations for a diverse and complex sector that has no clearly agreed or understood boundaries:

- Tension between predictability and flexibility/adaptability.
- Tension between ‘deepening and broadening’ — i.e. between wider membership and deeper interaction between members.
- Tension between inclusiveness in consultative process, and decisiveness in decision-making in response to crises.
- Tension between a focus on headquarters-based policy work addressing global issues, and field-based operational work focusing on country-specific issues.

Table 2 Typology of selected governance functions

Governance function	Donors	Donors and implementing agencies	Implementing agencies	Other non-governmental	Affected state and international humanitarian actors
Supporting policy-making and policy implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GHD Initiative • OCHA Donor Support Group • Country-level donor groups and joint donor offices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal networking at HQ and ad hoc donor liaison with agencies at country level, including donor group engagement in Humanitarian Action Plans and joint needs assessments • Inter-network dialogue initiatives, e.g. GHD outreach (e.g. Implementing agency and network participation in annual GHD meetings) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA) • IASC • SCHR • Global Humanitarian Platform • International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies • INGO international 'family' networks, e.g. Save the Children International Alliance • UN Humanitarian Country Teams & Integrated Missions • Clusters • East Coast Development Forum (ECDF) (India) • Pakistan Humanitarian Forum 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government-led inter-agency policy networks, e.g. Ethiopia's New Coalition for Food Security • Sri Lanka's Consultative Committee on Humanitarian Assistance
Supporting and facilitating policy verification and accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GHD (donor reports and commissioned reviews and assessments of GHD Principles implementation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ALNAP • Donor-agency network relations linking donor monitoring and accountability departments with agency counterparts, supporting agencies' upward reporting to donors on use of donor funds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IASC • SCHR • ICVA • Sphere Project • Humanitarian Accountability Partnership • NGOs & Humanitarian Reform Project • Emergency Capacity Building Project (ECB) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DARA (Humanitarian Response Index) • Humanitarian Policy Group • Feinstein International Center • Groupe URD • Humanitarian Outcomes Center for Policy Alternatives (Sri Lanka) 	
Enforcing binding rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ad hoc donor group advocacy networks at country level, e.g. Bilateral Donor Group in Sri Lanka 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ad hoc donor & agency advocacy networks at country level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IASC (humanitarian advocacy) • Ad hoc country-level inter-agency networks for reporting human rights abuses, e.g. OCHA-supported database in Sri Lanka linked to implementation of Guiding Principles on Humanitarian and Development Assistance in Sri Lanka • Ad hoc INGO networks focused on advocating or negotiating for humanitarian access and protection & assistance of civilians in conflict, e.g. Operation Lifeline Sudan (Ground Rules); behind-the-scenes agency networks in Sudan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan; Congo Advocacy Coalition (DRC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African Rights • Human Rights Watch • Amnesty International • Centre for Policy Alternatives (Colombo) • Refugee Law Project (Uganda) 	

(continued)

Table 2 Typology of selected governance functions

Governance function	Donors	Donors and implementing agencies	Implementing agencies	Other non-governmental	Affected state and international humanitarian actors
Linking and resolving different issue areas and policy agendas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OECD's International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF) Donor government cross-departmental stabilisation units, e.g. UK's Stabilisation Unit; Canada's START 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IASC Contact Group on Good Humanitarian Donorship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA) UN Integration Steering Committee (ISG) Conflict Sensitivity Consortium NGO-Military Contact Group (NMSG) (UK) Ad hoc inter-agency network meetings, e.g. Humanitarian Practice Network roundtable on stabilisation in DRC Early Recovery Cluster Various inter-agency DRR and climate change networks 	<p>Informal networks associated with expert consultant networks projects (re. climate change, DRR, early recovery, stabilisation, civil-military relations, relief-development, urban displacement, arms control, children and armed conflict, etc.), e.g. Feinstein International Center; ODI/HPG; Center on International Cooperation; Humanitarian Futures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Various DRR networks linking state and non-governmental actors at different levels
Setting rules, norms and standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GHD (agreed Principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship) UNHCR Executive Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bilateral network relations establishing donor-agency partnership agreements Ad hoc donor-agency network interactions connected with setting rules for pooled funds Ad hoc country-level networks establishing agreed codes or principles, e.g. Guiding Principles for Humanitarian and Development Assistance in Sri Lanka or Basic Operating Guidelines (BOGs) in Nepal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IASC SCHR Sphere Project (with InterAction; Charter & Handbook) Code of Conduct 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Global Network on the Development of Guiding Principles for Displacement International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (involving academic institutions) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ad hoc country-level networks establishing and supporting implementation of agreed codes or principles of engagement, e.g. Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement
Mobilising resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GHD (reporting & monitoring) OCHA Donor Support Group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bilateral network relations establishing, implementing and monitoring core funding, donor-agency partnership agreements & disbursement of bilateral grants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DEC Joint Initiative (Zimbabwe) IASC: Sub-Working Group on the CAP; Humanitarian Financing Group Clusters CERF Secretariat external communication & liaison networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OCHA National and local civil society networks Religious networks Grant-giving foundations & associated networks 	

<p>Directly supporting humanitarian action and strategies on the ground –</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GHD (supporting timely, flexible and adequate funding) • UNHCR Executive Committee • Country-level donor networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ad hoc donor-agency network interactions re. disbursing pooled funds • IASC Contact Group on Good Humanitarian Donorship • Informal inter-agency networks associated with CAP/CHAP processes • IASC-donor inter-agency missions • Ad hoc donor liaison with agencies at country level, including donor engagement in Humanitarian Action Plans and joint needs assessments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clusters • HPN (Good Practice Reviews) • Ad hoc inter-NGO information-sharing networks at country level • Technical knowledge networks, e.g. Emergency Nutrition Network; Shelter Centre; Humanitarian Logistics Association; International Network for Education in Emergencies; Cash Learning Partnership • EC B • People in Aid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private sector companies & associated networks (corporate social responsibility, etc.) • Informal diaspora networks 	
<p>Developing usable knowledge and influencing policy and practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GHD (e.g. Working Groups commissioning expert reports) • Country-level donor groups (working group reports, joint conflict monitoring, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IASC (e.g. Core Group on Humanitarian Space & informal links with other relevant networks) • Ad hoc donor-agency networks at country level • ALNAP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICVA • InterAction • VOICE • Humanitarian Practice Network • NGOs & Humanitarian Reform Project • Asia Disaster Reduction and Response Network (ADRRN) • Africa Centre for Humanitarian Action (ACHA) • ECB 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal networks associated with expert consultant networks, e.g. ODI/ Humanitarian Policy Group (e.g. HPG Advisory Group) • Feinstein International Centre • DARA • Humanitarian Futures • Refugee Law Project (Uganda) 	

A considerable amount of the IASC's work is focused on the production of global policy guidelines, statements of principle, or manuals of best practice. The 2003 review identified widespread concerns that the IASC's policy agenda is overcrowded, but no agreement on what agenda items might be cut. Although the diversity of policy agendas and lack of clear decision-making structures through which to formulate, agree or implement decisions or policies in respect of these is an undoubted hindrance to policy-making within the IASC, the relative fluidity and lack of clear top-down direction within the network can also facilitate progress on particular policy issues if 'two or three actors with a commitment to an issue can push it through and create an important output' (ibid.). Similarly, at the field level, 'it only takes one or two committed individuals to be familiar with IASC policy outputs for those outputs to be incorporated into field guidelines or field practice'.

Because the IASC lacks any systematic means or authority to ensure or monitor the extent to which its guidelines or policy decisions are being incorporated into field activities, informal networking and networks within and beyond the more formalised hierarchy of networks within the IASC play a crucial role in its influence on humanitarian policy and operations in practice. While the effectiveness of the IASC at the headquarters level is liable to be viewed with some scepticism, the establishment of smaller structures, such as the IASC Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) that are closer to the operational realities on the ground to inform humanitarian policy is potentially an important step, and itself represents a significant policy innovation. Nonetheless ensuring commitment to this type of coordination structure at country level is not always a given. The many challenges that are unavoidably associated with network-based governance are always prone to impact on an HCT's ability to play a central strategic role, not least in countries with integrated mission structures where humanitarian leadership is tied to the UN's political and peacekeeping action. In many cases, coordination remains limited principally to information-sharing rather than extending to strategic policy or operational issues. Similarly, across different sectors of humanitarian engagement, the cluster approach at both global and country levels has acted as a catalyst for more open discussion between UN and non-UN agencies by providing a space for dialogue and the global clusters are now central to the 'structure' of the international humanitarian system, but they are generally not seen as having significant influence over policy and practice, particularly in the field (HPG interviews, 2009 and 2010; Stoddard et al., 2007; Martin, 2010). It is important to note that the inherent weakness of these networks in terms of setting policy or influencing practice on the ground may be a crucial condition of an inclusive membership, since many agencies would resist or oppose any network that had the potential to wield real policy-making power over them.

On the donorside, the GHD initiative reflects the largely voluntary consensus-based nature of regulation and compliance within

the humanitarian system at the global level. A key test for GHD is therefore whether it gives rise to a semblance of donor self-regulation and associated accountability. The relative youth of the GHD initiative — compared, for example, with the OECD's Development Assistance Committee — reflects the fact that emergency relief aid has flowed predominantly through UN and non-governmental actors and networks: these implementing actors, in competition with one another, have not exerted significant demands on donors in terms of horizontal or downward accountability. The comparatively minor funds involved as compared with development finance has also meant relatively limited interest in or scrutiny of how humanitarian donors perform at the domestic level in donor countries (Buchanan-Smith and Collinson, 2002).

As noted in an early review of the GHD conducted by HPG, as a voluntary initiative, the GHD network allowed the largest possible number of donors to participate in it. The concurrent trend towards 'whole of government' and integrated approaches towards fragile states among Western governments and within the UN post-9/11 also lent a timeliness and urgency to the initiative, with humanitarian donor institutions concerned to protect the distinctive purpose and nature of humanitarian aid (Harmer et al., 2004). The adoption of 23 Principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship by the members marked an important milestone for the humanitarian system as a whole, creating a basis for shared standards and processes of downward and horizontal donor accountability within the system which had previously been entirely absent (ibid.; Buchanan-Smith and Collinson, 2002). However, the inclusive and voluntary nature of the network — reflected in its expanding membership — has also posed challenges in terms of implementation, necessitating the creation of a supplementary networks, such as GHD Working Groups, to monitor and support the translation of donors rhetorical commitment to GHD principles into their practice (Harmer et al., 2004). Unsurprisingly, the voluntary nature of the initiative has resulted in differences in priorities and in approaches to implementation. As noted in HPG's 2004 review, and as remains the case today, effective coordination of donor policy has been elusive, with donors often uncertain and at variance with one another about how the principles should be interpreted, prioritised and/or applied in practice. It is noteworthy that where the GHD network made most rapid progress in the early stages — namely, in the implementation of a donor peer review process, and on mapping a definition of humanitarian action — this was driven via the GHD's relationship with the older, more formalised and rules-based OECD-DAC network.

Questions remain as what specific coordination responsibilities humanitarian donors should undertake at the country level, both between among themselves, and in their relationships with the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), cluster leads and other operational agencies, national governments, regional organizations, the political and peacekeeping elements of the UN, and, indeed, other parts of their own governments,

including departments of foreign relations and defence. Efforts to formalize donor networks at the country level and to mainstream the application of GHD principles and good practice into these have had mixed success. ECHO and USAID, which maintain significant in-country capacities to direct and monitor the humanitarian action that they fund, tend to pursue bilateral approaches to humanitarian funding at country level (Stoddard, 2008; ALNAP, 2010). While a joint donor office established in Southern Sudan has been widely perceived as ineffective (Harvey, 2009; ALNAP, 2010), other less formalized donor groupings established in DRC and Sri Lanka have had some success, not least as regards humanitarian advocacy (HPG interviews, 2008 and 2009).

At the global level, partnership between UN and non-UN humanitarian actors has emerged as an important theme of reform following reactions to the UN-centric approach of humanitarian reform implementation and the lack of engagement with both national actors as well as international NGOs. The Global Humanitarian Platform (GHP), established in 2006 to bring together UN humanitarian organisations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs, was based on the premise that a more effective humanitarian response is dependent upon a complementary approach between key actors, based on genuine partnership. The GHP network has adopted Principles of Partnership to apply to all aspects of humanitarian coordination and financing; these include equality, transparency, a result-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity. While these Principles are also intended to apply to coordination with national actors, the focus has so far largely been on relations between UN agencies and INGOs — i.e. actors within the ‘core’ of the *international* humanitarian system, and on financing relationships in particular. Despite the rhetoric, the GHP remains a largely symbolic network which has yet to exert any tangible influence over the wider system. As ALNAP’s 2010 *State of the Humanitarian System* observes, many participants have felt frustrated by the slow progress in this so-called ‘fourth pillar’ of humanitarian reform (ALNAP, 2010).

Although associated with considerable instability, uncertainty and lack of progress in many areas, it is important to note that network-based governance processes can also help to ensure flexibility and diversity in humanitarian policy. ALNAP’s *State of the Humanitarian System* mentions, for instance, the unique and reportedly effective Tripartite Core Group mechanism in Myanmar, which brought together the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Myanmar government and the UN (Turner et al., 2008). The review also notes the growing number of new NGO consortia approaches and attempted collaboration between agencies through initiatives, such as the Emergency Capacity-Building project at a global level and country-level approaches such as the Protracted Relief Programme in Zimbabwe (ALNAP, 2010, citing DFID 2007, and Jones 2006). In some situations, alternative cluster-lead models have been found to have a positive impact: for example, an evaluation of the response to cyclone Nargis in 2008 found that where

clusters were co-chaired, it ensured a more consistent strategic focus (Turner et al., 2008).

Networks can play an important role in shaping and facilitating innovations. For example, research by ALNAP (Ramalingam et al. 2009) has shown how formal and informal networks have helped to identify, develop, implement and scale up key operational innovations, such as cash-based programming, transitional shelter approaches and community therapeutic care. Networks are also central to helping to disseminate innovations beyond the original programming context. The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief and the Sphere Handbook and Charter represent crucially important innovations regarding the codification of shared principles and standards within the humanitarian system. These initiatives were generated by the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response,³ a major global policy network linking the CEOs of eight major INGOs and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. In turn, these initiatives have contributed to the emergence of new interlinked formal and informal networks, including the now well-established Sphere Project.

Networks also have the potential to protect the impartiality and neutrality of humanitarian action by preventing the system from being too easily captured or becoming too closely associated with any particular powerful political actors or interests. For example, in the late 1990s, the Joint Policy of Operations established by a group agencies on the ground in Liberia amounted to a set of humanitarian “conditionalities”; a clear articulation of the situation when aid would continue and when it would be withheld as a shared position among the main in-country humanitarian agencies presented to the belligerent parties (*ibid*; Leader, 2000).

3.2 Supporting and facilitating policy verification and accountability

The self-regulating nature of networks, the absence of explicit government-based authority or clear hierarchical administrative structures, and complexities as regards the quality and control of information and knowledge, mean that accountability poses major challenges within the humanitarian system.

Raynard (2000) has highlighted the general lack of clearly defined responsibilities among humanitarian organisations, and the consequent problems of attribution. Thus, for example, if food aid is not delivered to those in need, it may be difficult to establish whether this failure is the responsibility of the operational NGO on the ground, of the agency supplying the food, of the donor agency that is supposed to provide the financial resources, of diplomats who are negotiating humanitarian access, or of the belligerents who have denied access. If responsibilities have not been clearly defined at the outset, it is easy for one actor to lay the blame for failure at the feet of one (or a number) of others.

³ The Sphere Project developed jointly with InterAction.

This means that a systemic approach to accountability is needed. Perhaps largely due the complex networks-based nature of the system itself, there are no overarching international structures or mechanisms responsible for scrutinising the performance of the system as a whole. ALNAP's 2010 *State of the Humanitarian System* review represents a surprisingly recent and unique innovation in this regard, given the longstanding recognition across the system that the performance of the system as a whole needs to be better monitored and understood. As noted in the introduction, assessing the effectiveness of networks across the system depends not so much on exploring how well individual networks function, but rather on understanding how complexes of networks interact to influence particular and global humanitarian outcomes.

The mixed and diverse objectives of humanitarian action pose additional problems for accounting for the system's effectiveness, or the effectiveness of any component network within it. Although humanitarian assistance is about meeting immediate life-saving needs with material help, it is also expected in many contexts or by many actors to contribute to longer-term developmental needs, or to peace-building and conflict reduction. Without clear goals, it is all the more difficult to develop and agree appropriate criteria against which the system and its component agencies, organisations and networks can be held to account.

Accountability and learning has been a networks-based growth industry within the system since the serious failings in humanitarian action in the Great Lakes in the mid-1990s. This is reflected in a number of accountability-focused knowledge networks and network accountability initiatives, including Sphere, the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, ALNAP, the Emergency Capacity Building Project (ECB), GHD, DARA's Humanitarian Response Index (HRI), the DAC peer reviews and DEC evaluations. The majority of these initiatives are concerned with improving quality and performance in the disbursement of humanitarian aid or the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Yet none of the networks that have established shared norms or standards have created strong or explicit mechanisms for monitoring or enforcing compliance among network members. The network of agencies that have signed the Code of Conduct, for instance, has not taken steps to monitor adherence to the Code in practice, and there has been little assessment of the Code's humanitarian impact (Harmer *et al.*, 2004). DARA's HRI represents an important effort to strengthen accountability through public scrutiny, but there is no formal authority invested in this exercise, and its scrutiny role is conducted on an essentially *ad hoc* and voluntarily basis and only by proxy on behalf of the primary stakeholders – the electorates of the donor governments concerned and people whose welfare is or might be affected by donors' humanitarian assistance.

With less focus in recent years on the actual process of implementing humanitarian reform mechanisms across the system, greater attention has been paid as to how to strengthen

accountability systems within them. At the time of writing, a range of *ad hoc* meetings were planned involving both UN and non-UN agencies and donors to scope out the parameters and definitions of improved accountability systems, but there remained a divergence of opinions on the part of key actors involved in relation to priority areas for action and over the definition of accountability. Improving downwards accountability to beneficiaries remains a particularly difficult challenge, although a number of network-based initiatives and innovations are worth noting. Efforts to mainstream downwards accountability have included an initiative by the global WASH cluster to consult with cluster agencies to promote and identify challenges to downstream accountability, which led to the development of a series of accountability tools, including accountability checklists for aid workers and 'Community Leaflets' that provide information to communities on what they can expect from WASH programmes (Ferron, 2009). Another initiative, led by the SCHR in partnership with UNHCR, is the Peer Review Process on Accountability to Affected Populations, which seeks to promote improvements in both organisational policies and processes, as well as in the way in which agencies understand, conduct and practice accountability (see www.humanitarianinfo.org). The ECB is also supporting a variety of joint initiatives among the member agencies to strengthen downward accountability to communities affected by emergencies. Taken together, a key challenge for these initiatives will be to reach agreement over the definition of accountability, or of the different components of accountability. The other will be how to address underperformance, how it should be measured, and by whom.

3.3 Enforcing binding rules

Without authority to enforce compliance with international humanitarian or human rights law, humanitarian networks' engagement in enforcement-type activities is necessarily restricted to advocacy directed at national governments, belligerents and other duty-bearers. In many contexts, networks can provide a structure and conduit for information-sharing, reporting and joint advocacy that would otherwise be difficult or impossible for individual organisations. *Ad hoc* policy, advocacy and operational networks that are established at the country or field level can also provide a more or less informal forum through which mainstream humanitarian actors can remit information or present evidence to governments or other important actors outside the system whose actions may be crucial in affecting humanitarian space or humanitarian outcomes. Where humanitarian space is severely restricted by the actions or hostility of the government or non-state armed actors, for instance, operational NGOs may seek to share information or collaborate through informal networks to engage in unattributed and/or behind-the-scenes advocacy.

More formalised networks may also prove important forums through which to seek the compliance of a government or key non-state actor with national laws and international human rights, refugee and humanitarian law obligations. Until recently

in Sri Lanka, for example, the key high-level forum through which the Bilateral Donor Group members sought to influence government policy and action was the (now disbanded) government-led Consultative Committee on Humanitarian Assistance, which was attended by government ministers, heads of UN agencies and ambassadors of key bilateral donors.

3.4 Linking and resolving different issue areas and policy agendas

Although, in many respects, the international humanitarian system is a relatively closed ‘club’ defined broadly by shared

humanitarian values, it is nonetheless rife with contending and competing coalitions of specific sub-interests, each supported by networks of various kinds underpinned by competing sets of values, beliefs and ‘knowledge’. Different values and beliefs emerge within key networks, but are most obvious and pronounced between them, not least in the increasing number of contexts and policy areas where the humanitarian agenda overlaps with other competing international agendas, such as recovery and development, stabilisation, counter-insurgency, peacekeeping and state-building. Figure 1 illustrates the potential for extreme confusion in inter-network interactions cross-cutting all areas of humanitarian programming,

Box 1: Networks supporting principles and standards of engagement with private sector actors

Over the years, there have been a number of efforts to develop principles and standards to guide engagement between the two sectors. System-wide initiatives include the “Guiding Principles for Public-Private Collaboration for Humanitarian Action” developed by OCHA and the WEF.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) has been active in the field of humanitarian assistance since 2001, launching the Disaster Resource Network (DRN) in that year, and in 2006, the Humanitarian Relief Initiative (HRI).

The WEF describes itself as an “independent, international organisation/.../striving towards a world-class corporate governance system. Our motto is ‘entrepreneurship in the global public interest’” (<http://www.weforum.org>) Similarly to the BRT, the DRN aims to coordinate and mobilise the resources of the business sector towards humanitarian crises, including through identifying gaps in relief efforts and seeking to fill these through business contributions including both cash and in-kind assistance.

The HRI was formed in January 2006 by the WEF in response to the growing question of how to effectively integrate the private sector’s contribution within the overall structure of aid coordination under the cluster approach. It aims to match IASC cluster priority needs with key industry competencies, resulting in concrete public-private partnerships; develop sector specific set of guidelines for corporate engagement; and establish groups of companies committed to industry-level engagement with humanitarian relief (such as the Logistics and Transport Industry Humanitarian Workstream model – see <http://www.weforum.org/en/initiatives/HumanitarianReliefInitiative/index.htm>). A consultative process with corporate members and humanitarian agencies (UN, in particular OCHA, and NGO) resulted in the non-binding ‘Guiding Principles for Philanthropic Private Sector Engagement in Humanitarian Action’ in 2007.

This was a departure from previous models of collaboration in that it was an effort to encourage a more structured dialogue between humanitarian actors and the private sector, as well as informing business about humanitarian principles and how to facilitate their implementation (Binde & Witte, 2007). Partners include representatives from the private sector, the UN, INGOS

and the International Red Cross. It has attempted to place greater emphasis on identifying areas of mutual collaboration with the suggestion that clusters undertake a mapping exercise to identify the various level of potential engagement at both national and global levels as well as the different stages of the disaster response cycle (HRI, 2009).

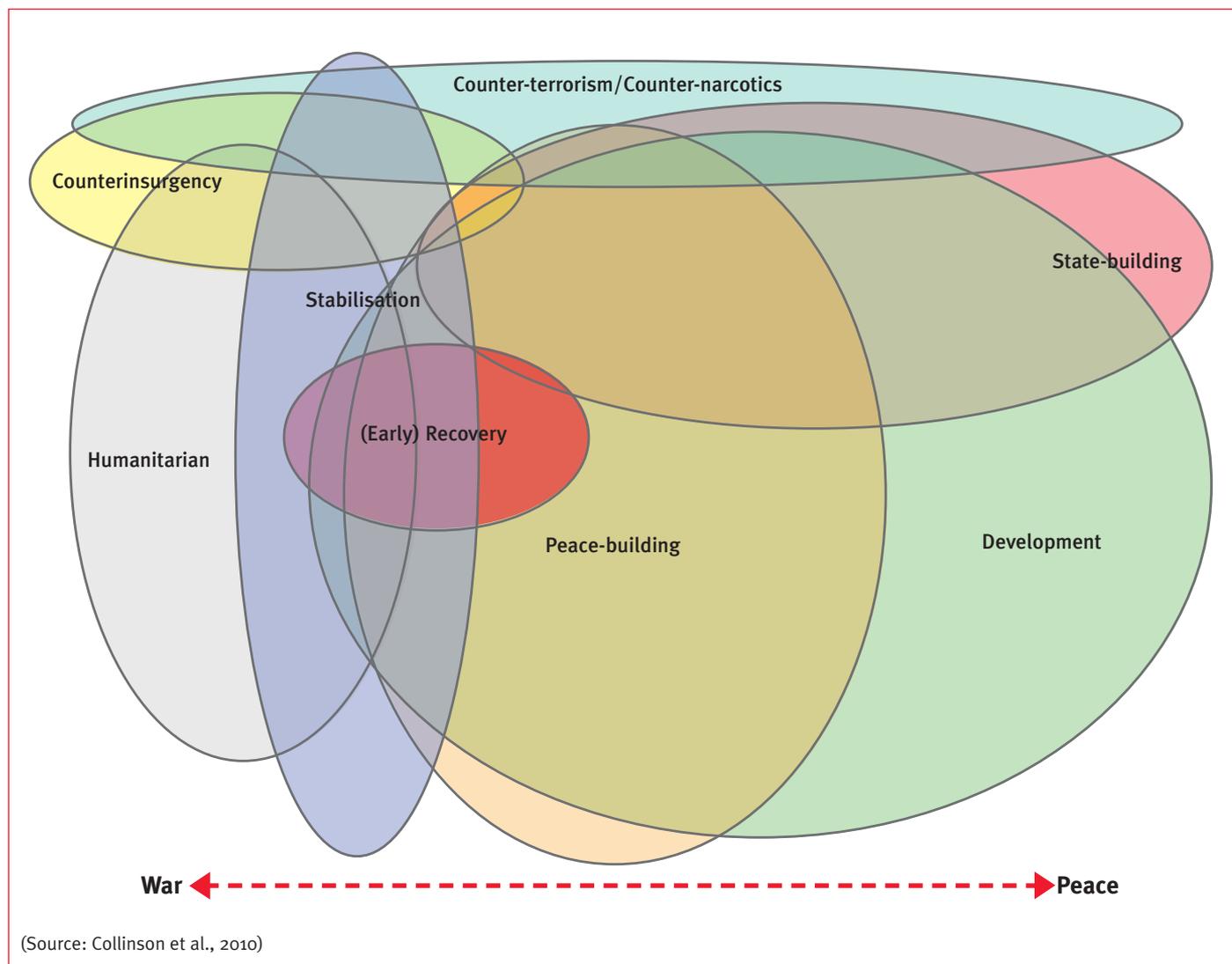
Other initiatives such as the Global Compact also act as ‘filters’ for commercial and humanitarian actors, whilst individual actors have a myriad of individual principles and standards governing engagement [depending on the nature of activities which can range from life-saving relief to advocacy or development.]

In contrast to a majority of collaborative initiatives, ICRC’s engagement with the commercial sector has developed with humanitarian principles as a key focus, coupled with the need for diversifying their resource base. Following an internal review in the late 1990’s aimed at guiding ICRC’s strategic positioning with actors having an impact on humanitarian issues, the commercial sector emerged as an important player that so far ICRC had not engaged with. While commercial actors were being recognized as potential contributors of goods and services, the analytical exercise highlighted the impact of commercial sector activities in humanitarian contexts, and the need for greater recognition of the fact that “willingly or unwillingly” the commercial sector is an important actor, and that its role needed to be better understood (ICRC interview).

Apart from the Corporate Support Group, ICRC seeks to engage with commercial actors operating in conflict zones through promoting IHL, raising awareness around ICRC’s activities and areas of concern in particular contexts, as well as sharing information regarding issues such as infrastructure or service delivery. This is done in the hope of promoting a greater sensitivity to humanitarian concerns and, in turn, to the protection of affected populations.

However, assessing “who are the main actors in the private sector who have a sensitivity to humanitarian response” (HPG interviews, 2010) remains a challenge. Furthermore, few other humanitarian actors are truly ‘neutral’ in the sense that ICRC is. The proliferation of standards and guidelines to guide collaboration adds to the confusion.

Figure 1: Overlapping international policy agendas focused on fragile states



particularly in complex political environments or so-called ‘fragile states’.

Hoberg and Morawski (1997) observed that policy networks can ‘converge’ or collide as issues start to overlap or merge with others. This suggests the possibility that the cultures of previously unrelated networks could clash, and lead to uncharted and perhaps uneasy relationships among key actors (Reinicke et al., 2000). As regards debates on humanitarian financing among UN member states, for instance, there is a concern among some DAC donors that G77 countries are bringing development language into relief, threatening to unravel the progress made under the GHD Initiative to maintain and protect the distinctiveness of humanitarian assistance. The UN’s Integration Steering Group — created specifically to ‘help ensure implementation and progress on integration related issues’ — represents an explicit attempt, through the creation of a new network, to address the unavoidable discordance between different network-based cultures of knowledge associated with the different parts of the UN (including humanitarian, development, political and

peacekeeping) that are now committed to working together within new integrated structures. In these contexts, the nature, quality and sources of the knowledge and information that is shared and disseminated through knowledge-based and other networks — for instance, as regards the impacts on humanitarian space of integrated missions or the delivery of humanitarian assistance by military actors — can have a crucial bearing on humanitarian policy and action and the policy and operational context in which it is implemented. As knowledge of policy impacts and implications deepens and broadens with a concomitant deepening and broadening in the reach of knowledge networks, decision-makers across the system are increasingly challenged with reconciling competing or conflicting cultures of policy-relevant knowledge and advice.

3.5 Setting norms and standards

The national and international legal context in which international humanitarian action takes place is typically complex and is defined by the combination of:

- National laws in affected states that govern the protection and assistance of civilians and the operations of international and national non-governmental organisations.
- International and regional treaties (e.g. Geneva Conventions; Universal Declaration of Human Rights; 1951 UN Refugee Convention; Organization of African Unity Convention) and associated instruments (e.g. specialised UN agency mandates; ICRC mandate) that establish the international humanitarian, human rights and refugee legal regimes affecting states' and other duty-bearers' civilian protection and assistance obligations in situations of conflict, human rights abuse and/or forced displacement.
- UN Security Council Resolutions setting out, for example, peacekeepers' responsibilities relating to the protection of civilians and/or the legality and objectives of UN or other armed intervention and associated obligations;
- National laws in donor states that govern the definitions, purposes and disbursement of humanitarian aid.

Although affected in fundamental ways by these overlapping legal regimes and their application (or not) by states and other actors in different contexts of humanitarian action, there is no clear body of international law that relates specifically to the supply-side in the delivery of humanitarian assistance. To the extent that the international humanitarian *aid* system is supported by normative frameworks at the international level, these are primarily sets of more or less *ad hoc* principles and standards that have emerged out of specific and, arguably — to the extent that they have no formal international legal status — equally *ad hoc* policy networks. These principles and standards are intended to guide and constrain members' behaviour; to that extent, they partially mimic traditional systems of intergovernmental and domestic governance, at least in terms of function, but they develop through an entirely different network-based transnational configuration of authority (Andonova, 2007). Consequently, they carry no power of enforcement; they have traction only on the basis of voluntary adherence and application by transnational network members.

All the major policy networks in the international humanitarian system have played a role in establishing norms and standards for the core system members. Since it was established in the early 1990s, the IASC has issued several policy statements, guidelines, and manuals that help to set the normative frameworks, common standards and good practice for the humanitarian community, such as the 2008 Civil–Military Guidelines and References for Complex Emergencies (IASC, 2008b), the 2007 Inter-Agency Contingency Planning Guidelines for Humanitarian Assistance (IASC, 2007), the 2006 Protecting Persons Affected by Natural Disasters — IASC Operational Guidelines on Human Rights and Natural Disasters (IASC, 2006a), and the 2006 Saving Lives Together: A Framework for Improving Security Arrangements Among IGOs, NGOs and the UN in the Field (IASC, 2006b). The IASC lacks any real compliance mechanisms, however, and the

Secretariat lacks the capacity to verify or assess levels of compliance in practice.

The GHD initiative has sought to reaffirm the centrality of the core humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence in the financing of humanitarian assistance. It reinforced the importance of saving lives and alleviating suffering wherever it is found, delivering relief according to need and without discrimination among recipients, refraining from taking sides and conserving the autonomy of humanitarian action from political, economic, military and other interests. In order to put this initiative into practice, a set of 23 principles was formulated to emphasise good practice particularly in terms of financing, promoting standards and enhancing implementation and learning and accountability. Recognising the challenges likely to be encountered in terms of implementation, the founding members of the GHD initiative agreed an implementation plan and established an Implementation Group — a discrete network within the wider GHD network.

As already noted, the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response — created in 1972 by five founding members, including both international NGOs and the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (later to become the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) — founded the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief. Articles 1 to 4 set out core principles required for humanitarian response, while the remaining six articles relate to improving the quality of humanitarian and developmental action. The humanitarian imperative, based on the principle of humanity, and the principles of impartiality and independence, stress that humanitarian response must be based on needs alone. They are derived from the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement Red Cross movement. The principle of neutrality, which is directly related to the special international role of the Red Cross, is not included in the code of conduct. Signature of and adherence to the ten articles of the Code is voluntary on the part of humanitarian agencies. The Code also includes two annexes containing recommendations to governments of disaster-affected countries and to donor governments. It is widely cited as a guide to conduct by humanitarian agencies, and it has been used as a basis for evaluating agencies' performance in specific emergency settings (e.g. evaluations by the UK-based Disasters Emergency Committee). However, in practice, the general and ambiguous wording of the principles has led to highly varied interpretations of their meaning in practice and, indeed, weak linkage between the principles themselves and action on the ground. Moreover, new networks with competing priorities and underlying principles — such as those relating to conflict sensitivity and 'do no harm' ambitions (e.g. the inter-INGO Conflict Sensitivity Consortium), human rights advocacy (e.g. Save Darfur Coalition), longer-term development programming, risk management and staff security — have all served to further complicate and sometimes obstruct the application of these principles in practice.

Box 2: Inter-governmental Networks

In theory, states are the primary actors in disaster response. UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182 of 1991, which gave the then newly formed OCHA a central role in the coordination of international humanitarian action, also stated clearly that:

“Each State has the responsibility first and foremost to take care of the victims of natural disasters and other emergencies occurring on its territory. Hence, the affected State has the primary role in the initiation, organization, coordination, and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory.”

The extent to which this is the case of course varies, and as HPG research has noted, humanitarian organisations have often “neglected the central role of the state” (Harvey: 2009 p.1). At a time of generally increasing state assertiveness, it is unsurprising that states affected by humanitarian crises should attempt to increase their role in their management. Moreover, given the stand-off position this leads to vis-a-vis traditional humanitarian donors, it is entirely logical for such states to pursue regional network modalities as part of strategies to strengthen their competencies and capacities. Such South-South learning is also important in the development sector and, as we shall see, it carries significant potential in disaster response.

ASEAN – regional action and learning

The aims of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) range across the economic and the political, from stimulating growth to promoting “regional peace and stability.” In the wake for Cyclone Nargis in May 2008 ASEAN became heavily involved in mediating international assistance, and a new instrument for the delivery of aid emerged from ASEAN structures, rapidly followed by regional network structures for humanitarian cooperation.

At the time, media and political discussions centred on the sovereign rights and responsibilities of the Myanmar state. In reality however, it was the eventual mechanism through which aid delivery was managed that is potentially more significant. The Tripartite Core Group (TCG) of the Government of Myanmar, the UN and ASEAN put the state at the centre of the coordination of the response. Although controversial, especially among NGOs, it was eventually praised in an independent system-wide real time evaluation both for creating humanitarian space and for effectively coordinating the subsequent response (Turner et al: 2008 p.21).

This increased activity and engagement from within ASEAN has important implications for networking in the region. Around the framework provided by the Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER), ratified at the end of 2009, ASEAN member states are engaging in a range of initiatives, including information exchange and the sharing of civilian and military response resources. The ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA Centre) has also been established as the operational coordination body and driving force of AADMER, which in time may be a significant step forward for collaborative learning in disaster management in the region. As the ASEAN head of disaster management and humanitarian assistance division said at the time of writing: “The Philippines has expertise in earthquakes and Vietnam in flooding. If each country focuses on

their specialties and shares that with the rest of the region, we'll be better off.” (IRIN: 2010)

SDMC – ‘beyond bilateral’

In the adjacent global neighbourhood, another regional body has been quietly going about creating networks to increase inter-governmental cooperation around disaster response. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is an economic and political organization founded in 1985 consisting of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan.

In 2006 the SAARC Disaster Management Centre (SDMC) was established to serve the eight member states by providing policy guidance, facilitating capacity building services and the exchange of information for effective disaster risk reduction and management. SDMC works by “networking through the National Focal Points of the member countries” which in practice hangs under constructive high-level interactions between the heads of the eight respective national disaster management agencies (SAARC: 2010).

More recently, the leaders of SAARC’s participating governments agreed to establish the Natural Disaster Rapid Response Mechanism (NDRRM) in order to move to adopt a coordinated and planned approach to emergency response. When fully established and implemented this would move the SDMC’s role from one of knowledge sharing, facilitation and capacity building, to one of brokerage in times of disaster, acting as a key mechanism for delivering resources between states. For instance, the NDRRM sees the creation of a standing list of disaster response capacities that all member states commit to making available to all others at times of disaster.

The rationale for further developments is clearly put by the Director of the SDMC: ‘it will take years to move to the regional model’ but it is essential to move ‘beyond bilateral’ due to the scale of the future challenges faced.

Emerging lessons

ASEAN and the SDMC are performing a number of network functions at the inter-governmental level to enhance humanitarian action, including:

- Community building and creating shared agendas for action around humanitarian and disaster response and reduction issues.
- Sharing and building knowledge by promoting learning and good practice, as well as focussed capacity building activities.
- Advocating for and channelling resources, both financial and goods and services in kind, to enhance disaster response.

SAARC’s iterative and step-by-step progress towards greater networking is in stark contrast to ASEAN, whose experience during the Cyclone Nargis response has led to more dramatic scale-up of efforts in networking across member states. However, in other areas there are similarities. Both networks ‘hang’ below larger structures of regional cooperation, and focus on resource and information sharing. Both stress the benefits of regional solidarity; and it is perhaps not surprising that cooperation on disaster issues might be seen by both as a conduit for improving relations more generally.

Problems with the formulation and application of meaningful ethical principles within the system may be related in part to the fundamental problem highlighted earlier with respect to the IASC, in that the complex and multifarious network-based nature of the humanitarian system means that the system itself has no firm or common point of reference by which to define itself or the core principles to which it adheres, or seeks to adhere. To this extent, the international humanitarian system differs radically from more formal and rule-based intergovernmental transnational regimes, in which, typically, the definition and agreement of rules and norms precedes the establishment of implementing networks. In the humanitarian system, by contrast, networks that have already formed around the implementation of humanitarian action have tended to move to establish norms in a more or less *ad hoc* way as common problems have been encountered or identified in the field. This is reflected in the development of the Sphere Project by the SCHR and the US-based NGO consortium InterAction – framing a charter for disaster response and developing minimum standards for humanitarian assistance in particular sectoral areas such as water and sanitation, food, shelter and health – a network initiative that was prompted directly by the sharply critical assessments of humanitarian agencies' responses to the Great Lakes crisis in 1994. The broad appeal and influence of Sphere in terms of setting norms and standards across the system is partly attributable to its technical focus, and the fact that membership of its Board is limited to NGOs and the Red Cross but the initiative enjoys a high level of effective recognition and buy-in from UN agencies and donors. Nevertheless, disseminating the Sphere standards has still proven a challenge, even among agencies that are most closely engaged in the network, partly because of the limited reach of the international secretariat at field level.

The predominantly Western-based membership of the dominant policy networks in the international humanitarian system that have been responsible for developing the dominant normative instruments at the global level has arguably undermined broader international acceptance of the claimed universal applicability of the principles that they have developed and endorsed. Recently, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference initiated a process to develop a distinct normative framework informed not only by accepted international principles of humanitarian action, but also by Islamic principles. Meanwhile, a number of Asian governments and organisations contest any presumed elevation of humanitarian principles to a level that might be seen as potentially compromising state sovereignty.

The doctrines guiding humanitarian assistance delivered by peacekeeping forces and other armed forces, including by mixed military and civilian teams (e.g. Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq and Afghanistan) differ in fundamental ways from the normative principles that many specialised humanitarian actors seek to hold to, such as the principles of independence and neutrality. Even mainstream humanitarian actors engaging in early recovery or advocacy-oriented protection activities

are likely to be guided by principles and standards that are quite different from those that the same agencies might seek to apply to emergency relief activities. Where conditions on the ground shift, agencies may shift in their orientation towards particular networks and associated principles, for example, if a situation develops that calls for a protection-oriented advocacy response as opposed to impartial delivery of material relief.

3.6 Mobilising resources

Resource-related networks refer to the collectives of actors who support the resourcing and disbursement of humanitarian financing. These are highly varied, reflecting the diversity of sources and channels of funding and associated mechanisms within the humanitarian system. They include headquarters-level NGO networks that seek and channel donations from individuals, such as the UK Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC). These are complemented in most donor countries by countless informal networks, some often very local and short-lived, through which individuals give money to specific organisations involved in responding to particular emergencies. Sometimes these funds enter the more established funding networks such as the DEC, but unknown levels of private funds (GHA estimates) are also collected and disbursed through networks in donor countries that have no recognized status within the humanitarian system, including through many religious and diaspora-supported networks.

Regarding official humanitarian financing, there are networks at the headquarters level dedicated to supporting the pooled resourcing and disbursement mechanisms of donor government funding, such as through the UN-led Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). The CERF Partnership Taskforce, for example, established in 2007 to review procedures for CERF partnership arrangements between UN agencies and implementing partners, includes representation from a number of INGOs and UN agencies.⁴ At the country level, networks exist dedicated to supporting the UN-led Common Humanitarian Funds (CHF) and Humanitarian Response Funds.

Resource networks can be seen to emerge from and interact closely with other key types of networks, particularly policy, operational and information networks. The IASC, for example, plays a key role in defining the appropriate criteria to guide CERF allocations on the ground. The GHD network can also play an indirect supporting role by underpinning donors' stated commitment to provide adequate, predictable, flexible and impartial⁵ humanitarian funding. In the case of CHF, the clusters (led by the Humanitarian Coordinator) play a central role in determining the most strategic allocation of funds. Informal networking between the different humanitarian actors involved is also likely to have a significant influence.

⁴ Christian Children's Fund, InterAction, ICVA, Save the Children, IMC, Oxfam, OFADEC, WFP, UNICEF, UNHCR, FAO, WHO, and UNDP.

⁵ See <http://www.goodhumanitariananddonorship.org/background.asp>.

Spearheaded by the UK, a core group or informal network of humanitarian donors within the GHD has provided the impetus and the majority of funding to the expanded CERF and pooled funding mechanisms (Stoddard, 2008). These governments have increased their overall aid targets, and at the same time are the biggest proponents and users of the pooled funding mechanisms (Martin, 2010).⁶ Meanwhile, at the country level, HCTs that have been in the process of establishing themselves as policy networks at the country level may perhaps start playing a greater role within resource networks. An updated guidance note was issued by the IASC in November 2009 stating how HCTs will be responsible for activating funding mechanisms, as well as advising the HC on resource allocation (IASC, 2009). Some large agencies, such as ICRC and UNHCR, convene donor groups that function as networks in and of themselves; they both allow the agency to influence collective donor policy and also for donors to network amongst themselves and learn about new issues and field contexts through field missions.

Although the networks associated with humanitarian financing are essential to ensure effective disbursement and monitoring of funds, with competition between numerous humanitarian agencies for finite funds, tensions within and between these networks are inevitable. Pooled funds have shifted relationships within specific operational networks, particularly between UN agencies and INGOs, as the financing reforms mean that NGOs now increasingly have to rely on receiving their share of funding through sub-grants from the UN (Stoddard, 2008). Donors' partial delegation of certain key resource governance functions to operational agencies, including the allocation of funds, has led to inter-agency tensions in some contexts, undermining the ability of agencies to coalesce around jointly determined strategic priorities (Martin, 2010). Although clusters may have helped bring about overall improvements in prioritisation processes, HPG interviews among a number of agencies in Sudan in late 2008 suggested that the decentralisation of the decision-making process had led to instances where the process was democratic rather than strategic, with cluster leads sometimes seeking to avoid inter-agency tensions by tending to divide resources equally rather than according to operational capacities and priorities and assessed needs on the ground.

Where there is tension or potential tension between resource networks or mechanisms, a key response of the key policy networks has been to address these through the creation of new resource-focused networks or network-based initiatives, such as the CERF partnership taskforce. The IASC proposed in 2009 that an IASC Group on Humanitarian Financing be created to look at the CERF, country-based pooled funds (CHF and

⁶ Note, however, that certain donors have remained diffident about pooled funding arrangements. In the case of ECHO, this is connected with the maintenance of a comparatively strong field presence and its capacity to directly assess, monitor and evaluate humanitarian spending more directly at country level compared with many other donors. Assessing the impact of greater donor engagement in operational coordination at the field level for in-country operational and policy networks and their related objectives is therefore another avenue for exploration.

Emergency Response Funds, ERFs) and broader humanitarian financing issues with the aim of ensuring better inter-agency dialogue and information sharing, tracking and broader financing trends, as well as providing a forum for discussion and follow-up of policy issues related to financing. It would liaise with the technical sub-working groups already covering specific issues such as the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) or the CHF (IASC, July 2009 consultation architecture). It also proposed that a group comprising technical experts be established for a limited period in order to address UN-NGO contractual issues (*ibid.*). Regarding the GHD initiative, enhancing partnerships between donors and humanitarian agencies through continued dialogue is stated as a core GHD priority for the period August 2009 – July 2010. This is to include efforts to improve field-level donor coordination in Sudan, DRC, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Chad and the operationalisation of GHD principles, to identify a new crisis context in which to enhance coordination, to explore options for joint monitoring and evaluation missions, and, in DRC as well as two other contexts, to support OCHA in carrying out monitoring, reporting and evaluation.

Pooled funds currently only account for 10% of overall humanitarian financing. In addition to accessing a share of official flows of humanitarian aid, NGOs have always relied heavily on raising funds through public appeals and private contributions. This was illustrated strongly by the global response to the 2005 Tsunami appeal established by the DEC, which raised in excess of £400 million for the humanitarian agencies to provide assistance to victims in Indonesia, Sri Lanka and India (DEC, 2005). Some bigger agencies, including Oxfam, Save the Children, and the British Red Cross, received in excess of £50 million each to undertake relief operations (DEC, 2008, p. 2). The earthquake in Haiti has also generated a comparably major response from private donors. The leading faith-based INGOs, such as World Vision, CARE and Christian Aid, are funded substantially by individual private donations that are collected through extensive church-based voluntary fundraising networks.

The DEC provides an important illustration of the role of media networks in mobilizing resources to support humanitarian response (see, for example, Proudlock and Ramalingam, 2008). The DEC's ability to reach the public is essential. It has a network of support to promote its appeals known as the Rapid Response Network that includes television and radio broadcasts, regional and national press as well as corporations and British banks. Social networking (Twitter, Facebook) and SMS technology is seen as increasingly important for fundraising from the general public, as witnessed recently in the Haiti response.

At the point of a humanitarian crisis, a complex set of interests, relationships, obligations and accountabilities between media and humanitarian organizations and networks arise and lock together: they can trigger, inform, critique and, in some cases, undermine international responses, influencing public perceptions, capturing political attention and shaping flows

of information, aid and other resources (*ibid.*). The actions of the media during the DEC appeal in response to the crisis in Gaza in early 2009 is noteworthy in this respect, due the fact that the BBC refused to broadcast the appeal, following which other broadcasters took the same decision. The BBC stated that it was concerned about assistance not getting through to the Gaza population given the volatility of the situation, as well as concerns over how the assistance that was getting through was being delivered (*Guardian*, 22 January 2009). However, it also stated that it did not want to risk undermining public confidence in its impartiality (*ibid.*). The decision generated huge criticism from the public as well as calls from the UK government that the BBC should reconsider its decision. Two channels, ITV and Channel 4, subsequently decided to air the appeal (*Guardian*, 24 January 2009).

Resource networks sometimes emerge in a relatively *ad hoc* way as a result of specific and immediate needs in a particular emergency context. For example, an NGO-led pooled fund, the Joint Initiative, was established in Zimbabwe in 2005 by a small network of INGOs operating in the country following the government's aggressive campaign to forcibly displace up to 700,000 slum-dwellers across the country. The government refused to sign off the flash appeal developed by the UN, and donors were slow to respond to an appeal lacking government backing (Konyndyk, 2009, p. 29). The Joint Initiative fund was coordinated and administered by Mercy Corps, and funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), USAID, AusAid, SIDA, CIDA and the government of Norway (*ibid.*); it overcame obstacles to resourcing through existing policy and resource

Box 3: Networks supporting private sector humanitarian funding

Many humanitarian actors approach corporate actors for the simple reason that they represent new sources of funding. However, as the above and earlier HPG research shows, financing represents a minor proportion of overall operational financing (Altinger et al, 2007). There is also very limited agency data available regarding corporate donations, and what little evidence there is suggests that financial contributions from corporate donors represents a minority of financial resources coming from private sources, apart from the ICRC which has received an unusually high proportion (20% on average from 2001-2007 6 years) from corporate donors (Altinger et al, 2007; HPG Interviews, 2006/07).

Unlike many network initiatives that were triggered by the Tsunami, the ICRC has been seeking to engage with the business sector since the late 1990s following an internal analysis to determine how the ICRC should position itself strategically at the international level and engage with not only the private sector, but also governments, civil society, research institutions, and humanitarian actors more broadly (HPG interviews, 2010). Since then, ICRC has been working to develop a support network with businesses with the aim of both diversifying their funding base as well as exchanging expertise. In 2005, this led to the creation of the Corporate Support Group, consisting of 10 Swiss companies (www.icrc.org). Membership criteria are strict. Companies have to make financial commitments for a minimum period of six years in order to join. The aim is to build long-term relationships, and exchange of know-how is becoming increasingly important. Businesses can donate technical expertise, while ICRC has significant knowledge of security management for example. Their strategy for engagement includes promoting knowledge of and dialogue around humanitarian principles.

More generally, fundraising strategies directed at the corporate sector seem to be more ad-hoc and where agencies have secure long-term funding-relationships, these tend to remain bilateral, rather than involve a network of humanitarian and business actors.

Given the lack of systematic analysis however, it is very difficult to gauge the impact of corporate financing, and the different opportunities and constraints associated with this. Findings from the interviews suggest that the capacity to tap into significant and sustainable corporate financial resources is likely to remain limited for a number of reasons.

The first is that within the business sector, there is an increasingly greater emphasis being placed on providing support to the humanitarian sector through for the provision of goods and services on a non-profit basis as opposed to cash contributions (Binde & Witte, 2007; HPG interviews, 2010). As one actor commented, "If our only interest is money, then the conversation is dead" (HPG interviews, 2010). At the same time, while having companies throwing money at a certain crisis or agency or need is at times problematic, "often one of the best things a company does is exactly that" (HPG interviews, 2010).

The second concerns the visibility that corporate actors tend to seek from financial contributions which is a disincentive to humanitarian actors seeking to fundraise from businesses. In the experience of one Doctor Without Borders' representative, financial contributions from corporate actors come with a number of conditionalities attached that make it difficult to assess the level of overall benefits: "companies would like to know exactly how their money is spent. It is in their interest to support very specific things and specific places and to get specific feedback, so that they can say to the public e.g. "we give a lot to Haiti". But the more feedback we have to give, the more money is spent on administration and communication" (HPG interviews, 2010).

The financial contributions of businesses to the earthquake response in Haiti illustrate this trend. Excluding contributions from private individuals and UNICEF national committees, the proportion of financial contributions towards the Haiti Earthquake response from businesses only amounts to 8% of the total contributions registered on FTS, or USD 172,486,766 out of USD 2,085,921,561 (see table 2).

networks, and was implemented through the presence of an informal operational network of NGOs.

New resource-related networks have started to be developed by ‘non-DAC’ humanitarian donors. Gulf states, in particular, are playing an increasingly important role in the financing of international humanitarian action, reflected in Saudi Arabia’s landmark contribution of \$500 million to the food crisis appeal of the World Food Programme (WFP) in 2009 (Harmer and Martin, 2010). Beyond outreach by established networks within the international humanitarian system, such as GHD the OCHA donor support group, however, potential for strong multilateral networks to develop among new and emerging donors may be limited by political differences and preference of the most non-DAC donors for providing direct bilateral, government-to-government assistance to affected states. The ten largest non-DAC donors channelled an annual average of 38% of humanitarian assistance directly to the recipient government in the period 2000–08, compared to 2.5% for the top ten DAC donors. For some states — such as Qatar, Russia, India and Saudi Arabia — direct allocations to the affected state represent more than 50% of their contributions (Harmer and Martin, 2010). Given different priorities and modalities of non-DAC humanitarian financing, there is potential for the emergence and evolution of resource-related networks involving non-DAC donors and affected states that may remain relatively distinct from the dominant humanitarian resource networks associated with the major DAC donors.

3.7 Supporting humanitarian assistance and strategies on the ground

3.7.1 Clusters

Clusters have developed as a dominant network formation across the system for directly supporting and coordinating humanitarian operations at country level. The cluster approach was formulated as part of the system-wide humanitarian reforms following the recommendations of the Humanitarian Response Review (HRR) commissioned in 2004 by the UN ERC in response, in part, to the weak international humanitarian response in Darfur. The HRR found capacity gaps and unpredictable response in a number of response sectors, including in protection, water and sanitation, shelter, camp management, food aid, nutrition and livelihoods support (Stoddard *et al.*, 2007). Through formal endorsement of network-based governance in particular sectors of humanitarian response at global and country levels, and through the establishment of clearer agreed processes of coordination and accountability within and across the cluster networks, the cluster approach aims to strengthen overall humanitarian response capacity as well as the effectiveness of response through ensuring sufficient global capacity, predictable leadership in all sectors of response, strengthening partnership and accountability, and promoting strategic field-level coordination and prioritization (Stoddard *et al.*, 2007). While sector coordination existed before the cluster approach

was adopted, the biggest difference compared to earlier coordination is the naming of cluster lead agencies, which assume the responsibility to coordinate activities within their sectors, identify gaps, and function of Provider of Last Resort (POLR) when there are critical gaps that no other humanitarian partners are able to fill. The role also extends to working with the HC and donors to mobilise humanitarian funding and advocate on humanitarian access (IASC, 2008a).

ALNAP’s *State of the Humanitarian System* notes that positive views about the value of the clusters to coordination outnumbered negative ones in interviews and in the evaluations reviewed (ALNAP, 2010). At the global level, clusters are seen as playing a useful role in bringing actors together more systematically to develop stronger policies and standards for particular sectors; at the national level, where clusters worked well, they were seen as providing clearer leadership and stronger sectoral coordination, and many UN respondents cited improved space for dialogue in global-level policy debates and certain country contexts with NGO and donor counterparts, facilitated by expanded NGO participation in IASC working groups and field teams. Where it has been implemented effectively by experienced and skilled coordinators, the cluster approach is reported to have made significant improvements in planning and coordination, and to have contributed positively to predictability and partnership in humanitarian action. The clusters are also seen as facilitating shared human and financial resources, rationalising tools and standards, improving the mapping of ‘who’s doing what where’, strengthening lesson-learning and sharing new technologies and training (*ibid.*). Four years after its launch this networks-based approach to coordination is now broadly recognized by international humanitarian actors as the ‘way of doing business’. It is now expected that the cluster framework be activated in all major new emergencies and be rolled out to all countries with HCs. At the time of writing, 25 of the 27 countries with HCs are formally using the cluster approach coordination framework (www.humanitarianreform.org)

A number of challenges remain, however, many of which are related at least indirectly to the networks-based governance of the clusters and their roll-out. Strengthening IASC procedures for setting up the cluster approach in major new emergencies remains a problem, particularly as many Resident Coordinators and agencies in these contexts are not familiar with or have limited experience with the approach (IASC ref.). Gaps still remain in providing operational guidance to the field and clarifying the different roles and responsibilities within the approach (*ibid.*). The 2008 RTE of the humanitarian response in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis showed, for example, that few cluster coordinators new to their role had received any substantial guidance around their responsibilities beyond an hour’s orientation. Moreover, few were familiar with or secure in their understanding of the concept of POLR five months into the response (Turner *et al.*, 2008). The further roll-out of the cluster approach also raises issues around financial

Box 4: Humanitarian and development assistance networks and the early recovery ‘gap’ in Northern Uganda

How to promote synergies between relief and development has been a source of long-standing debate – and arguably little progress – since the 1990s, including the relief to development continuum, and developmental relief. For humanitarian actors, early recovery, or promoting recovery in humanitarian settings has gained ground in recent years. Frameworks aimed at implementing these concepts in practice often appear premised on an aspiration for a ‘seamless transition’ to long-term peace and development through a coordinated shift from humanitarian relief to nationally-led recovery and development activities adapted to the different range of needs on the ground. The reality however, is often that of an emerging gap in relief and early recovery assistance.

A well-established obstacle to promoting recovery is the tension between meeting short-term, humanitarian priorities and addressing longer-term, structural causes of poverty, vulnerability and conflict. This tension has often been described in terms of perceived gaps between humanitarian and development systems, which have different actors, objectives, funding mechanisms and approaches. It can arguably also be described as a failure on the part of both the humanitarian and development networks guiding policy and programming to ensure an effective governance of recovery assistance.

Interviews conducted for this study provide an insight into the governance of recovery in the context of transition in North and North Eastern Uganda. Humanitarian and development networks can be seen to differ due to broadly distinct sets of objectives and values within networks. When these two network-based systems come together in transitional contexts, competing and shifting modes of governance involving competing interests, ideas, actors and principles associated with distinct policy and programming networks affect the capacity of both humanitarian and development actors to effectively carry out their functions, ultimately resulting in the failure to provide assistance that is conducive to promoting recovery.

Different networks are based on different cultures of knowledge and associated policy objectives, making effective and contextually-adapted decision-making, programming and resourcing highly complex. As in many other contexts of long-standing conflict, transition has been uneven and levels of vulnerability are high and insecurity remains. Assessing levels of need within these contexts and the extent to which recovery is under threat is difficult, and opinions vary widely as to whether needs are more appropriately defined as humanitarian, poverty or post-conflict-related. No side can be held to account as a situation has emerged where the capacity to ensure and to comprehensively assess the appropriateness, capacity, or accountability of actors involved and their associated policies and programmes in promoting a sustainable recovery from conflict is near impossible as a comprehensive picture or understanding of the current context and the assistance being provided is lacking. Which are the most appropriate actors and assistance frameworks, and hence networks through which to guide policy and programming therefore remains open to question. Most

‘humanitarian’ agencies operating in Northern Uganda also have broader mandates ranging from development to peace-building and human rights, and in many such contexts they themselves are transitioning in their own activities and objectives. This has the potential to weaken the capacity of humanitarian networks to ensure a strategic and coherent approach.

Since 2007 the main policy, programming and resource frameworks driving assistance in the North and North East have started the process of shifting from being humanitarian-led to being implemented under the government-led 3-year Peace Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP), which encompasses all conflict-affected regions in Uganda including the Acholi region in the North, and Karamoja in the North East. Influenced by strong historical development donor relationships with the government, recovery and development funding is mainly being channelled through government structures. The government move to take over clear leadership early on through the PRDP can be seen as an attempt to reassert control over the relief-dominated structures and networks in crisis-affected districts and a desire to rid itself of the negative publicity brought about by conflict and humanitarian crisis (HPG interviews, 2010). However the swiftness with which it moved to launch the PRDP hasn’t match the speed at which it has been operationalised, and relief is being phased out rapidly while development funding has been slow to materialise.

Humanitarian agencies faced a challenging situation in that they were implementing recovery programming, but also handing over the overall strategic leadership for this to a government with “mature policy and funding mechanisms at the central level, but not at the local level” (HPG interviews, 2010). Thus the question became what an overarching recovery response should look like in practice, and how clusters could better engage with government-led sectoral working groups in the process at both central and district levels. The objectives of the cluster system changed considerably from one of strengthening humanitarian response, particularly in the area of protection, towards working with district governments, who took up the role of co-chairs within the cluster sectors from 2007 and 2008, on developing operational and technical standards for basic service delivery, assess priority gaps and monitor the implementation of the Parish Approach together with district governments. Thus, in addition to operational activities, a key aim has been to strengthen the capacities of district officials as well as the linkages between the clusters and development actors at the national level. This has included harmonising humanitarian assistance with objectives laid out in the PRDP. Some actors felt the focus on transition and hand-over of cluster responsibilities was taking place at the expense of the main roles of clusters, including humanitarian response strategy and standards for disengagement. As one actor noted, the transition in itself has not been questioned: “the majority of humanitarian agencies have been focused on transitioning, so there hasn’t been much tension around shifting to more development-oriented approaches” (HPG interviews, 2009). *(continued)*

Box 4: (continued)

For many humanitarian agencies, the shift in operational focus has brought added time constraints to the growing number of agencies that have multi-sectoral approaches to their programming: “We’re involved in so many different sectors that it would be a full time job” (HPG interview, 2010). At the regional level in Gulu, a number of clusters were continuing to operate with some degree of effectiveness and the focus has shifted to coordination of recovery and development assistance under the District Development Plans (DDPs) to a greater degree than in Kampala. Their less formal and also somewhat smaller size and specific role with regards to handover of coordination responsibilities, combined with the weak capacity of district government may have contributed to their being more ‘resilient’, but the challenge has now shifted to one of ensuring agency participation rather than district leadership.

The fundamental problem may not be so much that policy, operational, resourcing and information networks are lacking, but rather, that clusters and other key aid policy and programming networks have been unable to effectively carry out their governance functions, a problem that has been exacerbated by conflicting, overlapping, competing or incomplete information on needs and context. Rather than this being just a question of whether humanitarian or more

long-term recovery and development objectives are more appropriate, it is a question of competition for influence in the overall leadership of assistance within and between complex network-based forms of aid governance. The strategic relevance of humanitarian assistance, and the capacity of networks to formulate and implement a strategy for humanitarian response in recovery has been weak, partly as a result of restricted resourcing, and weak governance and leadership on policy-related issues, including on the part of international humanitarian donors.

It is not clear what impact assistance has had so far, nor what are some of the most urgent ‘gaps’ assistance needs to address, or whether all actors agree upon and are working towards an over-arching set of strategic objectives. Up until 2009, humanitarian assistance continued to play an important resourcing role despite the shift in policy and programming context, but with a very narrow definition of humanitarian assistance which continues in 2010. Gaining a comprehensive picture of assistance has been near impossible, however, with a paucity of reliable and objective information and knowledge flows necessary to guide effective policy and programming as well as to address inefficiencies, and key networks lacking the capacity and influence to put them to appropriate use.

resourcing for networks or for network participation, which is voluntary for NGOs, since the effectiveness of the clusters depends critically on agencies having the human and other resource capacities to participate in the coordination and other network activities that are essential to their functioning. A further related challenge is that of the capacities of cluster lead agencies. Constraints on the abilities of cluster leads to fulfill their coordination responsibilities were raised in the first phase of the cluster evaluation (Stoddard *et al.*, 2007) as well as other country-specific evaluations carried out that year. The RTEs of the flood responses in Pakistan and Mozambique both highlighted that leadership, chairing and facilitation skills suffered from the cluster lead being burdened with heavy responsibilities in relation to their own agencies (Young *et al.*, 2007; Cosgrave *et al.*, 2007). This contributed to a lack of clarity around the role and authority of cluster leads in decision-making (Young *et al.*, 2007).

Inter-cluster — i.e. inter-network — coordination has proved a challenge in many instances, with the possibility that clusters may have strengthened sectoral responses at the expense of overall strategic coordination at country level, with funding playing an important role in this. The RTE of the response to Cyclone Nargis, for example, found that responses in the area of livelihoods recovery suffered from a lack of coherence, with a contributory factor being that funding channeled and disbursed through the cluster networks undermined incentives to develop joint approaches (Turner *et al.*, 2008).

3.7.2 Private sector networks

Numerous fora have emerged in recent years that are devoted to expanding or supporting the role private sector actors in humanitarian response. Natural disasters such as the Indian Ocean Tsunami and more recently, the Haiti earthquake, as well as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have highlighted the level of engagement of corporate actors in humanitarian action — as donors, as for-profit contractors and as partners. Over the past 5 years the level of interest in channelling commercial sector support for humanitarian action has grown markedly. Agencies are tapping into the human, material, technical and financial resources of the commercial sector and an increase in the commercial awareness of the value of responding to crisis, both for business and moral reasons, is driving greater willingness to provide in-kind and financial assistance to humanitarian agencies, or in some cases to lead independent humanitarian operations (Wheeler & Graves, 2008).

Private security firms are increasingly ubiquitous in the provision of security-related services to humanitarian agencies and other actors in contexts of violence and insecurity, and private reconstruction firms have become a major presence in contexts such as Iraq and Afghanistan where there is significant official funding flowing in for stabilization, reconstruction and state-building interventions. Often, private sector firms can offer technical areas of expertise which the specialised humanitarian agencies lack, such as waste management systems, logistics, transport and supply chain management, telecommunications, or

urban search and rescue. Commercial consultancy firms are engaged in almost every area of humanitarian action in every context, sometimes focused quite narrowly on particular areas of technical intervention for particular organisations, other times offering wide-ranging policy analysis or other advice and services to a range of actors. Commercial actors' engagement in humanitarian assistance is driven by profit motives, but some also have corporate branding, image and social responsibility agendas that substantially influence the rationale and nature of their engagement. All areas of corporate or private sector engagement in humanitarian assistance have a variety of formalised and informal inter-actor networks associated with them.

The sheer number of networks and their often *ad hoc* and rapidly evolving nature makes it very difficult to gauge their changing significance for humanitarian action and governance at any general level. Important questions remain unanswered, not least regarding the aims, quality, predictability and impartiality of corporate humanitarian efforts, the motives within the humanitarian sector driving greater engagement with corporate actors, and in particular, whether engagement between the two sectors is having, and can have in the future, a positive impact on humanitarian outcomes. The answers to all of these questions will be highly variable according to the contexts, sectors, firms and specialised humanitarian actors concerned. It is possible that, if harnessed effectively, corporate resources and competencies can in some contexts contribute to greater flexibility, technical ability, financial independence, and collective policy impact within humanitarian action. This potential has been a particular focus of explicit network-based collaboration between the business and humanitarian sectors in recent years (see Annex **). To date these have been mainly *ad hoc* and supply-driven, favouring natural disaster response within technically focused sectors such as logistics, transport management, telecommunications and IT. More formalised linking networks include the business-UN website, which seeks to facilitate collaboration through matching agency needs with what businesses want to offer in emergency response, with an overwhelming amount of the listed partnerships involve the donation of goods and services (www.business-un.org). This 'match-making' tool at the international level, is being complemented by the UN Global Compact Local Networks initiative, which is more development focused, and seeks to help bring together local private sector, civil society group, labour organizations and UN agencies at the country level, to discuss issues such human, rights, corruption or the environment (<http://www.unglobalcompact.org/>). Many UN agencies now also have UN private sector focal points that act as dedicated partnership managers. UNHCR for example, has created a network of multinational corporations which, since 2005, provide support in the form of specific skills and expertise when the need arises (UN, 2010 – full reference needed).

Other 'match-making' networks include the Business Roundtable which is a membership organisation of 160 CEOs

which launched its 'Partnership for Disaster Response' (PDR) initiative in 2005, prompted by corporate America's experience of the Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina and the realisation that there was a need for a more coordinated approach on the part of business response to crises. The Business Roundtable members together make up around one third of the value of the US stock market. The PDR seeks to expand corporate commitment – beyond financial contributions – to disaster response. Its focus is both domestic and international, and included the China earthquake and Myanmar cyclones in 2008 in addition to the Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina. To date, 30 CEOs have joined, and the PDR has developed guidelines for interested companies to assist in engaging with humanitarian agencies, and has sought to develop initiatives with members of the Inter-Agency Working Group. It focuses on three phases of humanitarian response, including preparedness, response and recovery. It works with both US and international relief agencies, including seeking to find ways in which to improve communication between business and agencies during emergencies, particularly around needs on the ground and where business contributions can be of most use. These include financial donations, medical supplies, information technology and communications equipment, logistics, shelter, and employee volunteers (www.respondtodisaster.org) They also monitor and disseminate information on disasters, including through partnering with media.

A detailed list of examples of Business Roundtable membership donations to the Haiti earthquake can be found at www.respondtodisaster.org, but some initiatives include Accenture providing volunteer employees to support the delivery of medical supplies to a hospital, supporting NetHope, a consortium of 28 NGOs in the restoration of communication, and donating services to NGOs via its Development Partnerships; Abbott Laboratories donating pharmaceutical drugs; FedEx provided free shipping services and IBM partnered with World Vision in delivering a vehicle tracking system; KMPG setting up a Disaster Relief Fund for Haiti, and assisting in pre-reconstruction planning; Procter and Gamble sponsored a benefit concert and donated the profits to relief agencies, whilst also promoting employee engagement on the ground. Other networks with similar functions include Aid Matrix, and which focuses on NGO partnerships – see www.aidmatrix.org

3.7.3 Southern and regional networks

'Regional and Southern-based' is understood to mean networks geographically situated in developing countries and regions which are most commonly the recipients of international humanitarian aid. The three networks highlighted in Annex 4 are intended to provide a 'snapshot' of the typology and development of regional humanitarian networks; they should not be seen as fully representative of the range of actors

⁷ Due to language constraints, networks in Latin America have not been considered. REDHUM, for instance, is an OCHA-hosted Spanish-speaking information network on humanitarian emergencies in Latin America and the Caribbean.

that fall into the category of ‘regional and Southern-based networks’. The three networks are:⁷

- Asia Disaster Reduction and Response Network (ADRRN)
- Africa Centre for Humanitarian Action (ACHA)
- East Coast Development Forum (ECDF)

These networks provide useful illustrations of two distinct kinds of networks that are present within the broader category of regional and Southern networks. Specifically, ADRRN and ACHA are examples of a ‘regional capacity builders and emerging policy influencers’, which may use the reputation and relationships of a host NGO to strengthen create and further network ambitions. ECDF, meanwhile, is an example of a ‘national response capacity’ network, which emerges at the point of an emergency to take on specific response roles and meet the needs of specific groups. More examples of both types of networks would almost certainly emerge through further research; for example, the Mozambique floods of 2000 saw Red Cross national society networks for national response capacity, and similar mechanisms emerged in Myanmar in 2008 (South, 2008). The Organisation of the Islamic Conference Humanitarian Forum is a relatively new network established explicitly to ‘create dialogue and understanding between humanitarian and development organizations from Muslim countries or denominations, and their Western and multilateral counterparts from the West and multi-lateral system’ (reference). In addition to its activities at the global level, the Humanitarian Forum has established four national forums in Indonesia, Kuwait, Yemen and Sudan. Similar approaches are emerging in West Africa, again through the work of an influential host NGO, OFADEC. More research on Latin America may highlight regional networks of the ADRRN or ACHA model.

Much of the information about the impact and contribution of these networks has been anecdotal. The lack of serious research by Northern-based humanitarian researchers and aid agencies into these networks may indicate a general lack of interest, or lack of funding for such work, and almost certainly reflects the general weakness of genuine North–South partnership in humanitarian action. Drawing on the available information, however, some preliminary and tentative conclusions might be reached, in the area of functions, funding and resources, contribution to humanitarian performance and future scope for network development.

The work led by ALNAP, ICVA and other global networks working in collaboration to strengthen regional networks is one of the few initiatives specifically targeted at such bodies. The premise of that work is that such regional bodies as ADRRN and ACHA should be getting more support and resources from the formal humanitarian system. However, progress has been slower than expected, illustrating the ‘hard sell’ of this work to the traditional humanitarian community, possibly reflecting a lack of interest among donors and INGOs or a concern that these issues are too far removed from direct impacts on the ground.

The networks considered for this report, and the emerging networks in West Africa and the Islamic world, suggest a need for external donor support to such networks. Such funding tends to be for specific programmatic or research and training activities, with little direct support for the networks themselves. This leaves all of these networks facing the challenge of resource and capacity constraints, which they generally overcome with the good will and freely given contributions of members. The role of key individuals in existing Southern and Northern networks and agencies is also important to pick up. Both ACHA and ADRRN have benefitted from the reputation and relationships of existing Southern organisations, and also from their relationships to Northern networks. Both ADRRN and ACHA have had close working relationships with ALNAP and ICVA.

Where they have proximity and sustained engagement with those living with vulnerability and with national and regional actors, and where their humanitarian role is not negatively affected by extreme or competing political pressures,⁸ Southern and regional networks might have a distinctive comparative advantage in the international humanitarian system. Such networks have the potential to be more sensitive to local conditions and context, and be better equipped to harness local resources and capacities. Given the continual weakness of the international humanitarian system to respond sensitively to issues of local context and capacities, such networks may bring a valuable and largely missing piece to the work of the formal system, and help to enhance the management, delivery and evaluation of humanitarian assistance and recovery programmes.

Humanitarian policy-makers and practitioners are increasingly realising that a range of factors – including climate change, demographic shifts, globalisation and re-adjustments in global power, as well as societal shifts – will lead to a continued growth in the size and complexity of humanitarian needs. In addition to the possibility of an increase in conflict-related emergencies, and large-scale high-profile ‘natural’ disasters, evidence suggest that there will be a marked growth in the number of small- and medium-scale disasters, particularly in Asia. These factors together will challenge the capacity of the established international humanitarian order to respond and meet these needs. Perhaps the most compelling aspect of such regional and national humanitarian networks is the their potential to play a central role in helping national, Southern or regional NGOs, alongside affected state bodies in emerging structures, to respond to these growing future needs. However, away from such broad visions, the potential for such networks to enhance the management, delivery and evaluation of existing humanitarian assistance should be enough to warrant further exploration and understanding of how this potential might be operationalised.

⁸ The question of how the role of national networks can be affected by domestic political pressures in highly contested or conflict-affected political environments will be explored in the follow-up draft through the field-based research conducted in February and March 2010.

Box 5: Supporting national, southern and regional networks

Along with International NGOs, national NGOs are the major implementers of humanitarian programming. But despite this, there is a clear power imbalance between them, and national NGOs have been ‘largely ignored in most discussions [of humanitarian response]’ (Ferris: 2010:69). This is reflected in the challenges faced by southern NGO in participating in global networks. That said, there have been attempts to include southern NGOs in new policy initiatives such as the Global Humanitarian Platform. The International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) has also worked to bring the interests of its national NGO members to the forefront of network deliberations, and continually raise the need to reappraise the nature of partnership in the humanitarian system. As a key component of its current strategic plan ALNAP aims to expand its global reach and engagement in order to better promote humanitarian learning, with a special emphasis on networks of organisations in crisis-affected countries.

There is a prevailing sense, however, that although these steps are important and useful, national NGOs will always struggle to be heard in international networks. This is partly practical – southern NGOs are a numerous and heterogeneous group, and it is neither possible to bring them individually to the table, nor to ascribe to them common positions or policies. That makes regional NGO networking an obvious strategy, but without sufficient resourcing networks they will be unable to carry out the functions needed to add value. For southern networks under constant pressure to demonstrate operational value for money, the prospect of providing additional resources for regional networks is remote. Perhaps paradoxically, this leaves regional NGO networks in the position of needing to demonstrate their convening power (outlined by ODI and ALNAP as perhaps the most challenging network function) before they can generate the resources to undertake more basic network functions.

While there is increased understanding of the aims and undertakings of these networks, much more needs to be understood about how such networks implement their activities to fulfil their various functions, and conversely what is inhibiting them from doing so. In addition, more needs to be learnt about how, and to what extent regional networks bring about changes in policy and improvements in the operational

performance of their membership. The extent to which regional networks can provide multi-stakeholder convening platforms needs also to be better understood.

Future research should focus on providing detailed strategies through which global and national actors can take part in, assist and support regional networks. In the absence of this, there are some preliminary actions that different stakeholders should consider:

- Donors could look to further support regional humanitarian networks as a key part of their humanitarian and development capacity building strategies. This could be undertaken both to realise efforts to engage more meaningfully with southern actors - state and non-state - and as a channel for disseminating good-practice. This ‘multiplier-effect’ offered by the cross-organisational reach of networks such as SAARC and ADRRN should not be underestimated. It may also be worthwhile donors considering pooling their resources to make the overall effort more coherent and impactful – as in the development sector where donors have supported pooled capacity building funds (e.g. the African Capacity Building Foundation (<http://www.acbf-pact.org/home.aspx>) which is a multi-donor initiative to ‘build human and institutional capacity for sustainable growth and poverty reduction in Africa’).
- Implementing international humanitarian agencies already maintain countless bilateral relationships with actors within their operational contexts, and interacting with collective groups should be seen as a logical progression. Indeed, engaging with NGO networks should be seen as a key strategy for continuing to enhance capacities against the backdrop of ever increasing pressure on overheads, particularly of national NGOs.
- Finally, there are steps that these regional networks and national state and NGO actors themselves could take, including working to enhance the way in which they communicate and engage with the international system. For instance this might include better communication of the successes and impact of the work they undertake. For their members, more attention needs to be paid to capturing evidence of the benefits of networks membership for their operational performance.

3.8 Developing usable knowledge and influencing policy and practice

Information and knowledge flows are vital across the humanitarian system, given the diversity and geographical dispersal of actors and activities across the sector, and the common weakness or disruption of local media and/or government information sources in many countries affected by crisis. Information and knowledge-sharing help inform and strengthen operational response and technical expertise, to support humanitarian policy and advocacy,

to mobilize and allocate resources, and to promote and strengthen the accountability of both humanitarian agencies and donors. This involves shifting pattern of affiliations and relationships between individuals, teams and networks that collect information and produce knowledge and ideas, that shape policy and organizational strategies, and that apply information, knowledge and ideas in an operational context.

New information technologies allow many different types of information and knowledge to be shared, managed and filtered with increasing ease and at ever-lower cost. But the combined

ease and complexity of information and knowledge flows through network-based transnational relations also pose significant challenges for some of the major organisations and networks that are considered central in the governance of the humanitarian system. On the one hand, advances in communications technologies have improved their ability to process information and knowledge, to organise political and bureaucratic processes in a more efficient way and to coordinate actions internally and externally in the context of the myriad of networks that the humanitarian system comprises. Technological developments that make rapid information flows possible enable the kind of decentralized, non-hierarchical network-based action that is so often needed to respond quickly and flexibly to humanitarian crises. On the other hand, this technology and the information and knowledge networks and processes associated with it may be evolving and developing faster than the policy- and practice-related institutions to which this knowledge and information relate. As knowledge networks become denser, faster and more sophisticated, they place greater demands on policy and operational actors and networks within the system, and risk making it more difficult for policy-makers and practitioners to control, structure and use knowledge and information effectively. The nature and transparency of knowledge and information and the means through which it is shared and disseminated has the potential to radically transform critical network relations across the system (cf. Reinicke *et al.*, 2000). The key question for humanitarian actors and networks is whether new information technologies and their application help people in crises, and help the organisations and networks concerned with providing effective assistance.

While there are some networks set up with the explicit and apparently straightforward goal of sharing and disseminating knowledge and information — such as AlertNet and IRIN — knowledge and information is rarely disconnected from some aspect of underlying networks-based governance in the humanitarian system, such as norm diffusion, consensus-building, community-building, the establishment or re-evaluation of actors' goals, or the assessment, adjustment or improvement of policy and practice in a particular area (cf. Andonova, 2007). Even dedicated information-sharing networks play a part in filtering and managing information flows, usually with the implicit, and sometimes explicit, aim of supporting and improving policy and action in some way.

Willard and Creech (2008) identify a number of ways in which specific networks may help to link information to policy processes, for example by increasing the stock, quality and scope of policy-relevant knowledge; by introducing new ideas to the policy agenda and broadening policy horizons; by introducing new concepts, approaches or 'ways of thinking' into policy; and by connecting people, testing new ideas and generating new norms. A 2003 review by Byron Gillespie of network projects concerned with influencing policy revealed additional roles that these networks play, such as bringing a critical mass of researchers (and research) around a

particular set of policy questions; creating communicative links between policy stakeholders; disseminating research and information to a wide range of policy stakeholders; and building or augmenting the capacity of targeted groups of policy stakeholders to participate in policy processes.

This work is broadly consistent with the analysis of so-called 'epistemic communities' in the study of international policy regimes in international relations. Peter Haas brought prominence to the issue with his work on international environmental cooperation in the 1990s (Haas, 1990), which depicted how decision-makers are influenced by 'knowledgeable' experts (Hasenclever, *et al.* 1997, cited by Sugden, 2006). Haas describes epistemic communities as 'a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue area'. While an epistemic community may consist of professionals from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds, they have a shared set of normative and principled beliefs, shared causal beliefs, shared notions of validity, and a common policy enterprise (Haas 1992, p. 3). Shared knowledge empowers an epistemic community — or epistemic network — to facilitate and influence policy decisions via the provision of information and advice. Application of this concept emphasises the importance of politics behind knowledge, since policies are crafted according to knowledge flows wielded by the network, the intensity of the pressure depends on the power, resources and objectives of the actors involved (Sugden, 2006). It also draws attention to high levels of uncertainty within policy institutions and networks: in a crisis situation or new or changing policy arena, policy-makers frequently seek information and advice from other sources (Haas, 1992, p. 4). They may rely on epistemic communities voluntarily, when soliciting experts to supply technical knowledge, or unwillingly, when subjected to the epistemic community's persistence or scrutiny. The relationship between an epistemic community and a policy-maker is complex, since it operates at multiple levels and with shared understanding affecting both the policy-maker's thought processes and actions (*ibid.*).

A variety of specialised teams and networks of 'knowledge experts' interact closely with or participate in other key networks within the humanitarian system to influence policy and implementation processes at a variety of levels. The most influential of these include think tanks, such as the US-based Feinstein International Center, the Humanitarian Policy Group in the London-based Overseas Development Institute, and Humanitarian Futures at the University of London; dispersed expert networks, such as the Emergency Nutrition Network, the Cash Learning Partnership, and ALNAP; and a number of expert consultancy firms, such as DARA, Groupe URD, Development Initiatives and Humanitarian Outcomes. These teams and networks interact in fluid and shifting sub-networks of varying formality, duration and development — sometimes responding to contractual opportunities associated with key humanitarian actors' policy agendas, or sometimes

actively shaping these. Many involve groups of collaborating agencies and/or donors working on specific policy or operational problems or innovations. They play a central role right across the system in evaluating humanitarian policy and operations, from the field up to the global level, and in driving new policy developments and innovations in all sorts of more or less specialised areas of humanitarian action. All the major international networks and organisations involved in humanitarian policy and action — including donors, UN agencies, NGOs and the Red Cross / Red Crescent organisations — rely on these expert knowledge networks to support their assistance and strategies on the ground, to monitor and analyse changing humanitarian needs and the contexts in which they are operating, to link and resolve different policy issues, and to monitor and assess their own performance. But key policy and operational networks also play a direct role themselves in creating and sharing knowledge and information, and influencing policy agendas and approaches to action on the ground.

3.8.1 Information and knowledge to support programming

The ability of humanitarian actors to collect, analyse and disseminate information on humanitarian crises and respond on the basis of this is key to a timely and effective humanitarian response. Information is also important for evaluating and assessing the impact of humanitarian action, as well as informing prevention or preparedness activities through early warning, for example. Information is critical to promoting humanitarian accountability, mobilizing resources and informing policy-making. Affected communities themselves need access to information about, for example, the whereabouts of family members, about physical or security conditions (e.g. whether it is safe to return somewhere), or about when and where aid will be delivered and who is eligible.

While information is central to any humanitarian network, information networks are specifically concerned with providing and sharing information on humanitarian issues. Core functions include managing or ‘filtering’ information by collecting, organizing, and disseminating information that is deemed useful; information networks can also help promote or ‘amplify’ a certain type of information, or message (for an explanation of these functions, see Annex 2; see also Court and Mendizabal, 2005; Ramalingam *et al.*, 2008). They can also play a more passive role by providing a platform for sharing or exchanging information. Such platforms may be formal entities, such as ReliefWeb, IRIN and Alertnet,⁹ which emerged initially as a direct response to operational needs, but have now expanded hugely to support a wide and diverse audience of humanitarian actors and other stakeholders. Formal information networks associated with coordination might focus on sharing needs assessments, funding appeals and humanitarian updates. Coordination through the clusters, for instance, has both assisted information-sharing between humanitarian actors, and has highlighted the continued need for effective information networks to facilitate

⁹ For further discussion of these networks, see Annex X(iii).

cluster responsibilities, ranging from needs assessments to information on ‘who does what where’.

A key gap appears to be the participation of Southern actors and networks. A 2006 evaluation of ReliefWeb found that it scored very poorly in terms of its representativeness. It showed that some respondents perceived it as representing what ‘the big players do, leaving out national and local NGOs and civil society actors’ (Wolz and Park, 2006). It found that national-level staff of governments and NGOs were often unaware of the portal, or found it difficult to use the site due to language barriers (*ibid.*). Internet access may be a contributing factor, as well as the fact that these actors may not have the resources to share their information on the Web. The perceived legitimacy of the knowledge and information provided by these networks has also been questioned, including the degree to which these networks are independent and neutral (Wolz and Park, 2006). Since IRIN and ReliefWeb sit inside the UN system, some have questioned their editorial independence. A respondent to the ReliefWeb survey noted: ‘The perception out there is that these Web pages are international and Western motivated and biased’ (cited in Wolz and Park, 2006).

In this context, it is noteworthy that OCHA’s FTS has played an important role in highlighting the growing importance and influence of non-DAC donor financing of humanitarian action. The service has allowed researchers to analyse these trends in efforts to inform the engagement of DAC donors with their non-DAC counterparts. However, field research has shown that there are large discrepancies between data on humanitarian financing presented on FTS and that found at the country level, suggesting that (a) the participation of non-DAC donors in the FTS is relatively weak, due in part perhaps to differing aid cultures and the preference of most non-DAC donors for government-to-government aid; and (b) that the role of these donors in financing humanitarian action is far greater than previously recognised (Harmer and Martin, 2010).

Many of the bigger and more formalized information networks do not always involve direct communication between those sending and receiving information. Sites such as IRIN, ReliefWeb and AlertNet have active secretariats that search out and vet information, providing a partial ‘filtering’ function. As has been argued previously, some degree of filtering and facilitation is essential for networks at various stages of their development, but there is a tension between controlling or producing information, or simply facilitating information sharing (Mendizabal, 2006). These concerns may be partially offset where networks — such as HPN or ALNAP — provide platforms or mechanisms for members to communicate directly, offering a convening function, but these networks are still active in selecting and filtering the information to be shared by members. New information technologies are likely to encourage the emergence of new networks to communicate or ‘amplify’ user-generated content and media-oriented information.

It may perhaps be inevitable that internationally run information networks are sometimes less well linked in to national-level civil society, or specific crisis contexts. There may be a necessary trade-off between providing a global service and high-level overviews of situations, and providing fine-grained, detailed local information and analysis. There are some initiatives that may help to mitigate some of these downsides: field-based Web platforms such as the Nepal Information Platform, or RDC Humanitaire, albeit often UN-owned, have in several countries helped to facilitate coordination and collaboration between various actors.

3.8.2 Informal information and knowledge networks

Informal networks and networking are also of essential for information and knowledge flows among humanitarian actors, with complex and dynamic information exchange taking place at numerous levels and different forums, including workshops, coordination meetings and day-to-

day social interaction. They include associations formed through common experience, working in the same location, discussions at meetings, conferences or coordination meetings. Many informal networks are initiated and coalesce around particular emergencies, and then continue to shape and guide interactions between those individuals. In practice, it is possible that informal and far less visible information networks play a more important role than formal networks in informing certain strategies and policies in practice. In a review conducted by ALNAP in 2004, around 40% of the staff interviewed described networking as a key source of on-the-job learning; in several cases it was seen as the single best source of learning (ALNAP, 2004).

Informal networks may play a particularly important role in particular areas or contexts of humanitarian response. For example, information networking to guide actors in

Box 6: Southern and regional information networks

During the 1990s, the UN launched a number of initiatives including the Humanitarian Information Centres at the field level, but also ReliefWeb and Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) as internet based-information platforms. At the same time, others from outside the sector began to focus services on the humanitarian community, notably Thomson Reuters through the AlertNet news service.

IRIN and AlertNet identify themselves as networks, and both grew from a regional focus in the Great Lakes in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide. The central network function performed by IRIN and AlertNet is amplification – promoting the humanitarian aspects of news and current affairs; and filtering – collating and distilling analysis of policy debates across the humanitarian sector.

Both information networks now provide information services for all major crises areas, but it is interesting to note that both started in response to a specific regional crisis. There have subsequently been efforts to recognise the importance of regional information management networks, such as work by the Humanitarian Information Network to explore the rationale for information management networks across various crisis affected regions (Rasu: 2006). However the consensus at that point was to work with existing global structures for information management, and this still appears to be the case; with the important exception being the Redhum network which operates across Latin America and the Caribbean.

Redhum – From Information to Capacity

Redhum (the name is an acronym based on the full Spanish name: *Red de información humanitaria*) is a humanitarian information network serving Latin America and the Caribbean, coordinated through OCHA's regional headquarters in Panama. Its primary aim is to collate and coordinate the broad range of Spanish language humanitarian information, news and policy documentation.

Redhum is modelled on ReliefWeb, and is in part a response to the limited multilingual resources available through ReliefWeb and other sources. But describing Redhum as simply a 'Spanish language ReliefWeb' would fail to recognise the range of innovative initiatives being put in place to enhance linkages between actors in the region.

Redhum demonstrates the amplifying and community-building functions that can be seen in other humanitarian information networks, but goes even further. The network is actively mobilising resources to support information management and, in turn, disaster response capacities of member governments. A key element of this is the placement of Redhum staff within ministries to collaborate across governments and other relevant humanitarian actors (Redhum: 2009 p.7).

In addition to increasing its role as a primary hub for information on emergencies in the region Redhum is able to assist member governments, as well as the UN; providing standardised tools and compiling data to facilitate learning and decision-making.

Although initiated by a third party, the network is using its role in boosting learning across the membership to simultaneously create a more sustainable network in the region, and the success of this effort will perhaps be a crucial factor in the network's longer-term viability.

Emerging lessons

In addition to the dissemination and promotion of information and policy in the region, it is also working to proactively build linkages for increased knowledge and resource exchange. And while it was conceived from within the international humanitarian system, there are longer term plans to embed ownership of Redhum within regional capacities. Indeed the provision of bespoke support services tailored for a particular regional audience may provide a model for other, more global, humanitarian information networks such as IRIN or Reliefweb.

negotiating humanitarian access will be highly sensitive and needs to be responsive to the detail of changing local political and other developments in ways that may not be possible for the more formal or public information networks. Establishing how strategic and tactical decision-making occurs in practice, including the significance and nature of local and national information networks, both formal and informal, and how these relate (or not) to the information-base of donor and agency decision-making at headquarters level is important to guide any efforts to improve humanitarian policy and practice; without it, for example, policy guidance from headquarters could risk being divorced from operational realities on the ground. Information sharing on particularly sensitive issues might be more likely to take place through informal networks and relationships. For example, where organizations are wary of direct participation in certain established networks – has frequently been the case for ICRC and MSF when fearful of compromising their independence, or for many operational humanitarian agencies concerned to share human rights or other information with advocacy-oriented networks without being publicly linked with them – informal networks can play a crucial role in facilitating low-profile sharing information and knowledge beyond the boundaries of established networks.

Online informal information networks such as blogs can also cater to a specialised audience or contexts. They also provide a platform for informally sharing and voicing opinions and critiques in a way that academic publications or humanitarian updates on ReliefWeb cannot. However, they are not neutral in the same way that ReliefWeb tries to be as they offer a certain take on a subject, or promote a particular message.

3.8.3 Supporting the quality and use of technical information and knowledge

Aid providers in any operational setting need a variety of kinds of more or less technical information and knowledge, including:¹⁰

- *Background and context:* Background information and analysis is needed to provide knowledge about the unique history, geography, population, political and economic structure, infrastructure and culture of the country or region affected by the crisis. Baseline data is also necessary to be able to compare the emergency situation and conditions to previous 'normal' conditions.
- *Humanitarian situation:* The latest about the situation on the ground and about the conditions, humanitarian needs, location and demographics of affected populations, the state of infrastructure and the security and political context is essential for effective delivery of relief.
- *Operational and programmatic information:* Information relating to the wider humanitarian response and humanitarian space is necessary in order to plan and implement humanitarian assistance programmes; for example, degree

¹⁰ Typology adapted from King (2005).

and geography of access, extent and gaps in national responses, programmatic and financial needs of different agencies, who is doing what-when-where, donor interests and preferences, who is funding what.

- *Technical knowledge and analysis:* Humanitarian information needs to be interpreted in context and related to existing technical knowledge about how to deliver different forms of aid. Analysis can include knowledge of key issues and previous responses, projections about the future, and recommendations for policies and actions.

Technical knowledge in the humanitarian sector can be further divided into a number of relief sectors or specialized technical areas, such as food, food security, agriculture, health, education, water and sanitation, shelter and settlements, camp management and coordination, logistics, disaster risk reduction, emergency telecommunications, livelihoods, early recovery, protection and mine action. Within these sectors or areas, humanitarian aid work is increasingly conceptualised, implemented and evaluated with the help of globally dispersed networks of technical specialists and experts. Numerous formal and informal networks support the sharing, development and use of specialist technical knowledge.

As the humanitarian sector has become more formalised and professionalized over the past two decades, there has been an increase in the numbers of formal technical knowledge networks in the humanitarian sector. Such networks tend to be consciously designed mechanisms for furthering knowledge and skills of participating individuals and organisations. These formal networks often emerged as the result of the effort of a group of technical specialists, usually on the basis of experience in a particular emergency setting and in response to a need to solve a specific problem or problems.

Examples of formal technical networks include the Emergency Nutrition Network, the Shelter Centre, the Humanitarian Logistics Association, the International Network for Education in Emergencies, and Cash Learning Partnership. In addition to these specialised networks, numerous generalist regional and global networks – including HPN, ALNAP, InterAction (United States), ICVA (Europe), LA Red (Latin America), Asia Disaster Reduction and Response Network (ADRRN), All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI), and Duryog Nivaran (Asia) – also actively support the sharing of technical knowledge and experience.

Formal networks can often emerge out of informal networks, although there the relationship is not an immediate and obvious one. To cite ALNAP research again, many of those in operational contexts argued that certain informal networks, especially in the operational setting, should not be formalised as this would inevitably change the dynamic and feel of the network. As one respondent commented: 'It's a good idea not to formalise the communities of practitioners too much. We do need consultation where people could say what they would never write up.' More

often than not, networks emerge out of particular projects or initiatives — for example, ALNAP emerged from the Joint Evaluation of the response in Rwanda, while the Shelter Centre emerged out of the Shelter project. Sometimes collaborations between key individuals or organisations can create new networks — for example, the cash learning partnership emerged out of the tsunami cash learning group funded by DFID and SDC. Such networks may also play a role in amplifying certain ideas from within the community to the wider sector. In some instances, networks on under-represented sectors (such as education and shelter) have acted as amplifying mechanisms for the entire body of knowledge, advocating for the importance of the sector to the humanitarian system as a whole.

In some instances, technical knowledge networks have played a major role in influencing investment in particular areas or aspects of humanitarian action, such as by moving issues higher up the donor agenda. DRR networks, for instance, have influenced DFID policy on DRR expenditure in 2005 (reference). And as already noted, particular networks of practitioners have helped to move certain sectors higher up the humanitarian priority list. ALNAP and ICVA's efforts to broker additional resources for regional Southern networks are a good example of network-to-network collaboration.

A number of initial hypotheses and questions emerge from the initial research for this report. The following deserve further investigation:

- Understanding how formal and informal aspects of networks interact in both policy and operational contexts will be of value for those facilitating such networks.
- Technical knowledge networks feed into information networks and are firmly enmeshed with operational networks but may often have a weak connection to policy networks. Understanding how the information landscape of the sector is shaped by these networks would be useful for analysts, researchers and practitioners. Use of narratives and case studies of how specific pieces of information or events are relayed across these networks would be of particular interest.
- Technical knowledge networks may have a tendency to replicate and reinforce the programmatic silos within and among agencies. In most situations, technical knowledge networks have run in parallel to each other, with very few individuals positioned as boundary spanners, either substantively or operationally. The recent move towards clusters could potentially institutionalise these divisions and silos. An unintended consequence of these approaches to coordination could be that technical knowledge becomes more firmly and narrowly defined around a specific, technically focused set of objectives, and may not take account of broader, systemic issues. Analysing technical knowledge networks in terms of their interactions and connections across substantive areas can help to identify how they might expand their activities in the future.

3.8.4 Monitoring and context analysis

Monitoring remains a key weakness across the system (ALNAP, 2010, citing Beck, 2003). Dedicated network-based innovations to address this problem include the creation of a UN Interest Group on Real-Time Evaluations (RTEs) which has a mandate to make RTEs a standard undertaking. Other positive new initiatives in particular sectors were also noted, such as Valid International's newly developed continuous monitoring approach for nutrition projects (SQUEAK), with coverage as the key determinant being monitored for success (ALNAP, 2010). Through establishing a platform for joint needs assessments, improved information management, common planning processes and more effective monitoring mechanisms, the cluster approach is also seen to have improved monitoring, helping to better identify gaps, reduce duplication and improve geographic and programmatic coverage, and strategic planning and prioritization (references).

But considerable challenges remain as regards monitoring and the management and use of information in the field, many of which can be attributed at least in part to variability in the quality of information and knowledge and in the relative reach and power of competing knowledge and information networks, and to variability in flows of knowledge and information within key global and country-level networks supporting policy and operations. A recent study by Oxfam in DRC, for instance, found that individual agencies continued to have considerable independence in determining their programmes and their location, and that, as in many contexts, informal information about humanitarian needs plays a more important role in determining responses on the ground, with agencies often carrying out formal needs assessments after a decision over where to intervene had already been made (Haver, 2009). Country-level Humanitarian Action Plans (HAP), for instance, have often been weakened by poor needs assessment, context analysis and information management, and poor linkage of strategic objectives with diverse and changing needs on the ground, and the prioritisation of cluster-specific priorities and information over cross-cutting issues.

A recurrent theme in the humanitarian literature is a concern that international agencies do not invest sufficiently in broader analysis of the contexts in which they work, beyond somewhat mechanical monitoring of project-related outputs (ALNAP, 2010). Yet there have been recent innovations, such as two context analysis and decision-support tools developed by World Vision International: 'Making Sense of Turbulent Contexts' and 'HISS-CAM', which was originally designed to improve principled engagement with military actors. These tools are now being tried and applied by a broadening range of agencies through a number of informal and emergent networks linking researchers and practitioners, including through a multi-agency action research network on 'Dilemmas and Principles of Humanitarian Action in Challenging Environments', established by the London-based Humanitarian Policy Group.

These initiatives raise questions around the capacity of agencies to invest in analysis of the dynamics of crises, and the best means of doing so. As previous research on needs assessments has argued, these must not only be concerned with multi-sectoral analysis, but also be based on an understanding of the wider context in which assistance is provided, including the priorities of affected populations, what options they have for meeting their basic needs, as well as local and national capacity for response (Darcy and Hoffman, 2003). In all conflict-affected contexts and protracted crises, political economy analysis to support effective programming and to help agencies 'do no harm' is increasingly accepted as needed (cf. Collinson *et al.*, 2002). Yet, for most agencies, robust analysis of this kind remains largely ad hoc and at the margins of assistance activities on the ground. This encourages standardised interventions that may not be appropriately adapted to local conditions, and it weakens downward and outcome-focused accountability and agencies' ability to apply 'do no harm' and other principles and standards of good practice. The context analysis gap is not due to an overall lack of appropriate or accessible information and knowledge, or to a paucity of appropriate analytical tools. The disjuncture between aid practice and an increasingly sophisticated knowledge industry focused on fragile states points to the likely significance of institutional impediments to mainstreaming context analysis. These may result from organisational and resourcing structures, cultures of practice, and incentive and governance systems within aid organisations and the wider aid industry. The problem may be exacerbated by competing cultures, networks

and communities of knowledge associated with different programming and policy areas.

In complex environments, knowledge and information are rarely value-neutral: there is always huge potential for conflict, competition and contradiction in the sources and use of knowledge and within and between the numerous networks through which information and analysis are collected, processed and used by humanitarian actors. Recent HPG research in northern Uganda, for example, highlights how the context analysis supporting the Ugandan government's three-year Peace Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) has underpinned the transition strategy of the Food Security and Agricultural Livelihoods Cluster, co-led by WFP and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), which is to run alongside the WFP's support for the government's priority areas for agricultural growth and strengthening the diversification of livelihoods (WFP, 2009). The government-centred knowledge networks associated with the PRDP that have informed the analysis of the conflict feeding into the WFP and FAO programmes are incentivised to underplay the significance of key dynamics driving continuing conflict in the north of the country; at the same time, specialist humanitarian knowledge networks have encouraged a view that food relief will hold back recovery by keeping communities dependent on food aid. The risk is that competing knowledge networks supporting alternative views of the conflict and of the impacts of food aid are marginalised from key decision-making, which in turn might weaken the evidence base for curtailing food aid in a context where levels of vulnerability and the risk of continuing or escalating violence are still extremely high (HPG interviews, 2010).

Chapter 4

Conclusion: priorities for future research

This review has highlighted the importance and ubiquity of network-based forms of inter-actor interaction in almost every aspect and level of policy-making, decision-making and action across the humanitarian sector. It has pointed to how, *in combination*, these networks influence and often fundamentally determine the nature and outcomes of all key forms of governance within the sector. The dominant international networks included in this review are highly significant for defining and shaping what is conventionally recognised as the international humanitarian ‘system’, establishing a semblance of shared norms, rules and respected institutional structures to govern relationships and *modus operandi* among key actors who consider themselves, or are recognised as, part of this system. Given the sheer number and variety of network structures and relationships involved, however, this review could only hope to capture a very small cross-section of what is, in fact, a vast, complex and ever-changing network landscape.

What has not been possible within the parameters of this short study has been any kind of systematic or detailed qualitative assessment and analysis of the implications of networks-based governance for how the humanitarian system functions in practice. Particular forms of networks and particular forms of network interactions fundamentally affect how ‘the system’ responds to humanitarian needs of all kinds in all contexts, and yet there is still very little known or understood at all about the real dynamics and consequences, strengths and weaknesses of networks-based governance and action – or of particular networks or types of networks – for humanitarian responses in the real world. For instance, the relative success or failure of key aspects of the humanitarian reforms, and lessons currently being drawn from experience with the reforms so far, have not been properly analysed or assessed in terms of the inherently networks-based nature of the system and the implications of this for the real dynamics and challenges of leadership, coordination, accountability, adherence to shared norms and other essential aspects of inter-actor relationships and performance across the system.

There are a number of important observations or hypotheses about the way that the system functions that can be drawn from this review and from a recognition of the dominance of networks-based governance and action in the international humanitarian sector more generally. The humanitarian system is characterised by high levels of inter-actor competition combined with networks-based governance: there is no overarching governing authority, no explicit or overarching

rules-based regime, and the actors that constitute the system are mostly self-regulating transnational networks that come together in both structured and unstructured settings to attempt to create mutually-supporting systems of governance. Relationships and rules between these networks are fluid and dynamic and they mostly rely on voluntary compliance (Dobusch and Quack, 2008). Networks-based governance demands that humanitarian actors negotiate among themselves within the system in an attempt to come to agreed positions and actions. This has led to the normative development of common standards and codes of conduct. These are often endorsed in theory but adherence to these is often weak and uneven in practice. This reflects a lack of hierarchy and *de facto* value pluralism within the system, with the numerous networks representing and reflecting a plethora of diverse and competing priorities. This, combined with market-based competition among the various organisations involved, can lead to fragmentation and contestation within the system. Yet, paradoxically, where networks come together they also create barriers to entry and reinforce boundaries between those that are deemed part of the system and those outside. Barriers to entry into the system can exclude other types of actors and networks involved in humanitarian responses, such as important Southern, regional and local actors, or military, private sector organisations and religious and political organisations. While these barriers may appear to strengthen the system in certain important respects, they may also encourage or reinforce perceptions that the humanitarian system is an exclusive and mostly Western project and a vector for certain values and modes of behaviour that many may distrust or reject (Donini, 2010).

These aspects of networks-based governance, action and interaction within the humanitarian system call out for more systematic research and analysis because of their potentially profound implications for what can or cannot be expected of the system in the face of the many serious internal and external challenges that it faces at multiple levels. These include the implications for what forms of system-wide improvements or reforms could prove most significant or effective in practice and how these might interact, and which may be destined to continue to frustrate, or what important aspects of performance or reform might have been overlooked in light of the changing contexts of humanitarian action, such as engagement with a variety of ‘non-system’ actors that may play an important role in delivering or influencing humanitarian responses.

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Annex 1

Institutions and networks associated with the international humanitarian system

Local and civil society institutions and organisations. Local community-based institutions and civil society organisations, diaspora networks, local markets and commercial networks, traditional kinship, religious and leadership institutions are increasingly recognised as playing a crucial role in the dynamics of coping and survival in most humanitarian emergencies. However, these local institutions and the complex networks through which people are connected to and through them, are poorly recognised or engaged within the broader international humanitarian system. Numerous reviews of food security and livelihoods programming in conflict and protracted crises, for example, have identified poor understanding and support for local and informal institutions as a key weakness in international humanitarian responses in protracted crises (e.g. Jaspars, 2010). Recent research by the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) on livelihoods and protection also shows the importance of many kinds of civil society organisations, particularly community-based organisations, in influencing food security and protection in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Sri Lanka, Darfur and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (Jaspars and O’Callaghan, 2010).

Affected state institutions. Current HPG research highlights the extent to which affected states, although formally recognized as central players by the humanitarian system, are in practice often marginalized from the international humanitarian effort, despite having a key role to play in humanitarian responses and bearing primary responsibility under the social and political contract (Harvey, 2009).

Military and armed actors and networks. The increased demand for security services among many humanitarian agencies operating in conflict zones (Stoddard, Harmer and DiDomenico, 2009), coupled with the growing privatization of the security sector at international and national levels, the changing nature of international humanitarian intervention, and efforts within the UN and among many donor governments to integrate political, security, peacekeeping, development and humanitarian policy and action more closely, have increased attention to the role of military and other armed actors in humanitarian action. In the United States, private military and security companies have formed a trade group called the International Peace Operations Association. One of the largest of these, ArmorGroup, states that it has subscribed to the Red Cross Code of Conduct and the voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights; its client list features a large number of humanitarian organizations, including UN agencies, INGOs and donor governments (Schreier and Caparini, 2005).

In Afghanistan, the delivery of humanitarian and reconstruction assistance by the Provincial Reconstruction Teams is closely integrated with military and security strategy. Other military and armed actors that sometimes play a prominent role in delivering, controlling or influencing the delivery of humanitarian assistance include national militaries, occupying powers’ militaries and non-state armed actors (e.g. Hezbollah).

Corporate and commercial actors and networks. Although UN agencies and INGOs dominate the humanitarian sector in most situations of international humanitarian response, for-profit corporate actors and corporate-backed foundations are playing a growing role in humanitarian and related activities in many contexts, particularly in areas of logistics, security and post-conflict recovery, reconstruction, and increasingly in humanitarian donorship. In Iraq, for example, 98% of US government reconstruction contracts have reportedly been awarded to commercial organizations rather than NGOs (Mingst, 2005). The Danish company Demex Services has engaged in mine action projects on behalf of UNHCR, the World Bank and the European Union (EU); meanwhile Kellogg Brown & Root, a subsidiary of Halliburton constructed and operated camps for Kosovo refugees (Schreier and Caparini, 2005). Humanitarian issues are now firmly on the agendas of key global networks involving corporate actors, such as the UN Global Compact and the World Economic Forum.

Non-traditional or emerging donors. Recent HPG research reveals that donor governments that remain outside the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (DAC) account for up to 14% of official humanitarian financing in a given year. While some have supported the UN’s pooled CERF funding mechanism, many of these donors concentrate their humanitarian funding on a few, usually sudden-onset crises and show a strong preference for government-to-government aid or channelling assistance through national Red Cross/Red Crescent societies rather than multilateral routes. They tend to define humanitarian assistance more broadly than traditional donors, often focusing their funding on the reconstruction of infrastructure. The trends derived from the different country sources indicate that the financial role of non-DAC donors may sometimes be far more significant than is reported through international humanitarian channels, such as the Financial Tracking Service (FTS). In the case of the Pakistan earthquake, non-DAC commitment was listed in FTS as accounting for 16% of the overall response, whereas national reporting within Pakistan indicates that these commitments amounted to 48%. These donors remain largely under-represented in formal international forums shaping aid policy, such as the GHD (Harmer and Martin, 2010).

Annex 2

An alternative typology of network functions – the ‘Network Functions Approach’ – initially developed by Stephen Yeo (reference) and elaborated by ODI identifies six functions that networks play within the humanitarian system:

- **Filters:** Filter networks 'decide' what information is worth paying attention to – they provide a way for unmanageable amounts of information to be organised and used in a productive way.
- **Amplifiers:** Amplifiers help take new, little-known or little-understood ideas and makes them public, give them a weight or make them understandable. Many advocacy or campaigning NGOs are amplifying networks.
- **Convenors:** Convening networks bring together people or groups of people. This function goes beyond filtering and

amplifying and requires an ability to reach very specific audiences in several sectors and levels.

- **Facilitators and learners:** Facilitating and learning networks help members carry out their activities more efficiently and effectively – including other network functions.
- **Community-builders:** Community building networks promote and sustain the values and standards of the group of individuals or organizations within it.
- **Investor/provider:** Investing networks offer a means to provide members with the resources they need to carry out their main activities.

These roles are not considered exclusive, as networks usually play more than one role (Court and Mendizabal, 2005; Ramalingam *et al.*, 2008).

Annex 3

Examples of networks linking private sector actors with the humanitarian sector and humanitarian action

Business Roundtable

The Business Roundtable is a membership organisation of 160 CEOs which launched its 'Partnership for Disaster Response' (PDR) initiative in 2005, prompted by corporate America's experience of the Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina and the realisation that there was a need for a more coordinated approach on the part of business response to crises. The Business Roundtable members together make up around one third of the value of the US stock market. The PDR seeks to expand corporate commitment – beyond financial contributions – to disaster response. Its focus is both domestic and international, and included the China earthquake and Myanmar cyclones in 2008 in addition to the Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina. To date, 30 CEOs have joined, and the PDR has developed guidelines for interested companies to assist in engaging with humanitarian agencies, and has sought to develop initiatives with members of the Inter-Agency Working Group. It focuses on three phases of humanitarian response, including preparedness, response and recovery. It works with both US and international relief agencies, including seeking to find ways in which to improve communication between business and agencies during emergencies, particularly around needs on the ground and where business contributions can be of most use. These include financial donations, medical supplies, information technology and communications equipment, logistics, shelter, and employee volunteers (www.respondtodisaster.org) They also monitor and disseminate information on disasters, including through partnering with media.

The World Economic Forum (WEF)

The World Economic Forum (WEF) has been active in the field of humanitarian assistance since 2001, launching the Disaster Resource Network (DRN) in that year, and in 2006, the Humanitarian Relief Initiative.

The WEF describes itself as an “independent, international organisation/.../striving towards a world-class corporate governance system. Our motto is ‘entrepreneurship in the global public interest’” (<http://www.weforum.org>) Similarly to the Business Roundtable, the DRN aims to coordinate and mobilise the resources of the business sector towards humanitarian crises, including through identifying gaps in relief efforts and seeking to fill these through business contributions including both cash and in-kind assistance.

The Humanitarian Relief Initiative was formed in January 2006 by the WEF in response to the growing question of

how to effectively integrate the private sector's contribution within the overall structure of aid coordination under the cluster approach. It aims to match IASC cluster priority needs with key industry competencies, resulting in concrete public-private partnerships; develop sector specific set of guidelines for corporate engagement; and establish groups of companies committed to industry-level engagement with humanitarian relief (such as the Logistics and Transport Industry Humanitarian Workstream model – see: <http://www.weforum.org/en/initiatives/HumanitarianReliefInitiative/index.htm>). A consultative process with corporate members and humanitarian agencies (UN, in particular OCHA, and NGO) resulted in the non-binding 'Guiding Principles for Philanthropic Private Sector Engagement in Humanitarian Action' in 2007.

This was a departure from previous models of collaboration in that it was an effort to encourage a more structured dialogue between humanitarian actors and the private sector, as well as informing business about humanitarian principles and how to facilitate their implementation (Binde and Martin, 2007). Partners include representatives from the private sector, the UN, INGOs and the International Red Cross. It has attempted to place greater emphasis on identifying areas of mutual collaboration with the suggestion that clusters undertake a mapping exercise to identify the various level of potential engagement at both national and global levels as well as the different stages of the disaster response cycle (HRI, 2009).

A growing area of interest for the WEF and corporations with a global reach more broadly is that of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). Networking between business and humanitarian actors around DRR remains predominantly informal and ad-hoc, but is progressively shifting towards more formal network structures facilitated by a different range of actors, including businesses. UNISDR for example has launched a collaborative initiative around the Hyogo Framework for Action (HPG interviews, 2010), and in December 2008, a Ministerial Conference on DRR took place in Kuala Lumpur with the objective of establishing multi-stakeholder partnerships for DRR bringing together East Asian governments, national, regional and international UN agencies, NGOs and Red Cross/Red Crescent societies, as well as national and international businesses (Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction 2008).

The Business Humanitarian Forum (BHF) and post-conflict recovery

Based on the premise that both the private and public sectors have common interests in the stabilisation of developing and post-conflict communities, the BHF is a network of private sector, humanitarian and other non-profit actors,

that has worked since 1999 to identify and bridge the gaps of understanding between humanitarian agencies and the private sector and promote collaboration between the two sectors. The main tenet of the BHF is the belief that the private sector can contribute to conflict prevention and peace building through investment, job and wealth creation and economic basis for society. This in turn requires knowledge of risks to business and of the political landscape of a particular region or sector, something which international agencies are in a good position to supply.

Like HRI, the BHF model draws particularly on the expertise of the private sector, and attempts to allocate them where they are most needed. Examples include private-public cooperation programmes aimed at supporting post-conflict reconstruction and human security. It facilitates contacts and support between potential partners, convenes contact group meetings, and conducts public information activities in areas such as Afghanistan, the Balkans and southern Africa. In Afghanistan for example, the BHF arranged informal dialogue sessions between their contact group of humanitarian agencies and contributions in order to identify how they could best tailor reconstruction efforts, leading in this case to a pilot project for a generic medicine production facility (www.bhforum.ch).

The ICRC Corporate Support Group

Unlike many network initiatives that were triggered by the Tsunami, the ICRC has been seeking to engage with the business sector since the late 1990s following an internal analysis to determine how the ICRC should position itself strategically at the international level and engage with not only the private sector, but also governments, civil society, research institutions, and humanitarian actors more broadly (HPG interviews, 2010). Since then, ICRC has been working to develop a support network with businesses with the aim of both diversifying their funding base as well as exchanging expertise. In 2005, this led to the creation of the Corporate Support Group, consisting of 10 Swiss companies (www.icrc.org). Membership criteria are strict. Companies have to make financial commitments for a minimum period of six years in order to join. The aim is to build long-term relationships, and exchange of know-how is becoming increasingly important. Businesses can donate technical expertise, while ICRC has significant knowledge of security management for example. Their strategy for engagement includes promoting knowledge of and dialogue around humanitarian principles. This is not restricted to the members of the Corporate Support Group which have to conform to strict ethical criteria, but also companies operating in conflict-prone areas and who have a direct or indirect influence on humanitarian concerns.

Annex 4

Examples of Southern and regional networks

The three networks considered for this project were the Asia Disaster Reduction and Response Network (ADRRN), The Africa Centre for Humanitarian Action (ACHA), and the East Coast Development Forum (ECDF). Information on the initial two networks builds on the prior research conducted by HPG, as well as prior experience of ALNAP staff members of working with these networks, while the material on ECDF draws heavily on a 2008 article in the journal *Disasters* (Kilby, 2008).

Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network

The Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network (ADRRN) states its aim as being to “promote coordination, information sharing and collaboration among NGOs and other stakeholders for effective and efficient disaster reduction and response in the Asia-Pacific region.”¹¹ With a secretariat based in Kuala-Lumpur, Malaysia, a shared workplan and governance structure, and a new three year strategy, and members across the region, ADRRN is one of the most advanced regional or southern networks working on humanitarian issues. The network is housed in and draws on the staff and financial resources of a leading Asian NGO, Mercy Malaysia, which has considerable profile in Asia. ADRRN was originally founded in 2002 after the Asia Disaster Reduction Centre (ADRC) and OCHA brought together 30 Asian NGOs to discuss the need for a network of NGOs for disaster reduction and response in Asia. The network was subsequently restructured and re-organised in 2003-4. Noting that Asia is the most disaster prone continent, ADRRN’s Chair, Jemilah Mahmood, draws a clear link between the alarming rise in disasters due to factors including, “global climate change, rapid and unplanned urbanization, environmental degradation and depletion of water resources”, and the concurrent need for “multilevel networking and collaboration” to address disaster response and reduction, with the goal of improved disaster management.

ADRRN currently has 34 member organisations working in disaster preparedness and response issues. ADRRN has had a clear focus on community-building, information exchange and learning. In addition, ADRRN is increasingly presenting unified policy and advocacy positions, and working to present a consolidated case for civil society engagement in decision-making across Asia. It has also actively worked to change the perception of southern NGOs by encouraging and supporting its members to engage with international humanitarian quality and accountability initiatives.

A central focus of much of its work is around capacity issues, advocating for increased funding of Asian NGOs, stressing the importance of local contextual knowledge to disaster response

¹¹ www.adrrn.net

and vulnerability reduction, and encouraging and supporting its members to gain international certification such as HAP and People in Aid.

ADRRN has also increasingly made conscious attempts to strengthen its cohesion and functions as a network. This work has made explicit use of the Network Functions Approach, and a strategy developed in collaboration with ALNAP Secretariat staff as part of the ALNAP Southern Networks Programme. ADRRN has also successfully raised some funds and support from UNOCHA, AusAid and others. Specific network activities have included cross-network trainings and workshops organised by ADRRN or particular network members, for example on issues such as post-tsunami reconstruction, tsunami resilience, training and capacity enhancement for local Government, disaster preparedness and joint emergency needs assessment.

African Centre for Humanitarian Action

The announcement of the African Centre for Humanitarian Action (ACHA) at an NGO capacity building symposium in December 2004 was an attempt to realise the need for increased capacity amongst NGOs in Africa, and to collectively address the challenges of resourcing and access that inhibit the growth of African humanitarian NGOs (CCP-AU: 2008). It was created with the aspiration of “planting the seeds of change for an African renaissance”. It seeks to build on existing knowledge and expertise, to unite and strengthen African Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), “through stronger partnerships, increased learning and improved advocacy, in order to achieve greater impact for vulnerable communities”¹². Its work is focused on capacity support and development for African CSOs working on humanitarian and conflict related issues. This work includes advocacy to present African perspectives, concerns and priorities; information and knowledge management to enhance capacities through shared learning; research and dissemination activities; and finally technical assistance and service which aim to build the skills and resources of African CSOs.

For a variety of reasons, the promise at the 2004 meeting has not fully materialised as a sustainable pan-African network. Despite its strong African focus and calls for African ownership of humanitarian efforts in the continent, its governance is divided amongst a combination of representatives of African CSOs, international NGOs, intergovernmental agencies, foreign governments, universities, and the African private sector. What ACHA has been able to do is deliver key contributions, notably on protection for the African Union and evidence-based policy for the ODI’s Civil Society Partnerships Programme. However, these have generally been delivered on a consultancy basis by ACHA secretariat staff, rather than through a networked approach.

¹² <http://achanet.org>

There is doubtless still enthusiasm amongst African humanitarian NGOs to work collectively, and new attempts to build sustainable networks are emerging. For instance, the African NGO Task Force to the UNHCR is aiming to form a network of like-minded African NGOs working with UNHCR to respond to assist refugee and IDP populations across the continent. The initiative is attempting to learn from previous experiences and stresses that organisational capacity development amongst African NGOs is an essential component of effective partnership and mutual accountability, stressing the benefits of accountability for UNHCR and network members alike. The task force has focused on addressing a specific problem (displacement across Africa) and actor (UNHCR), and has sought to demonstrate existing linkages between African NGOs (see, e.g. <http://www.africahumanitarian.org/NewsLetters/African%20Voices%20February.pdf>). In the words of one individual behind the task force, the first goal is to be able “to say we have a network.” As the task force seeks to raise the funds needed to move to the next level of operations, it will be interesting to see whether this will prove a more fruitful route for building regional networks in Africa. Through the membership of its host organisation in ALNAP, ACHA has established relationships with ODI through the Civil Society Partnership Programme. This has seen the involvement of ACHA in a number of development policy initiatives, including the G20 CSO consultation process (for example, see the ACHA Chair’s blog on the ODI website¹³).

East Coast Development Forum

The East Coast Development Forum (ECDF) is a network of 12 local Indian NGOs which formed in the immediate aftermath of the Indian Ocean Tsunami, working together to provide immediate relief, restore livelihoods, and advocate

¹³ http://blogs.odi.org.uk/blogs/g20_consultation/archive/2009/07/28/african_centre_for_humanitarian_action.aspx

for improved and more responsive government services. In the immediate aftermath of the tsunami, ECDF received funding from Oxfam Australia, and network members are estimated to have provided assistance to 20 per cent of the affected population along the east coast of India (Kilby, 2008).

ECDF emerged from existing cross-NGO networks which expanded in the post-tsunami phase to include those organisations representing particularly vulnerable groups. The fact that these organisations had a history of active collaboration to advocate for issues affecting their key constituency groups was seen as being a major contributor to the success of ECDF.

At the administrative level, each of the 12 member NGOs was responsible for their existing constituency of ‘vulnerable groups’ typically made up of small Self Help Groups (SHGs). They worked together to agree and utilise common procedures, for example, distributing a standard package of supplies to the members of the SHGs in the emergency phase, and establishing a common approach to provide cash support to existing SHGs under already-established systems. In order to function effectively, ECDF employed a decentralised and informal structure and operating style with rotating leadership based on; “trust, confidence and credibility that enabled the ECDF to access the affected communities to determine what was required and how to proceed” (Kilby, 2008).

Kilby concludes that the network activities present an example of how local humanitarian networks can, with external financial support, provide a timely and appropriate response. Prior knowledge of the context and ‘proximity’ to the local population are cited as reasons contributing to this success, but the closely networked nature of the organisations was also seen as a key enabling factor (ibid.).

Annex 5

Examples of formal and informal information networks

IRIN

IRIN is a UN initiative which was launched in 1995 in East Africa following the Rwanda Genocide. While it is an OCHA project, it is editorially independent. With regional desks in Nairobi, Johannesburg, Dakar and Dubai, it states its principle role as being to provide news and analysis for the humanitarian community focusing on Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia (IRINnews). The networks targets a broad range of actors including agencies, donor and host governments, academic institutions, the media as well as humanitarian advocacy and human rights groups. It also aims ensure that affected populations can access this information. Most outputs are in English, while its radio programmes are disseminated in over a dozen languages. It has a network of staff in sub-offices as well as freelance correspondents to enable the dissemination of information from all crisis contexts within the region (*ibid.*). Walker & Maxwell (2009) describe it as one of the best sources of real-time analysis.

Reliefweb

Launched by the UN in 1996, and administered by OCHA, Reliefweb describes its core functions as acting as an: "independent vehicle of information, designed specifically to assist the international humanitarian community in effective delivery of emergency assistance, it provides timely, reliable and relevant information as events unfold, while emphasizing the coverage of "forgotten emergencies" at the same time" (Reliefweb). Reliefweb disseminates humanitarian information through its website and email subscription services. It includes a map centre and emergency updates, and enables both operational agencies as well as research centres to post and share reports and analyses. Through the Financial Tracking Services (FTS), it provides real-time information on humanitarian funding, it also has a section specifically dedicated to humanitarian practitioners including Communities of Practice, job vacancies, training opportunities and an directory of information providers. There are over 70,000 subscribers to its email subscription service, in 2004 the site received around 1 million hits a day, and for a period following the Indian Ocean Tsunami, this increased to around 3 million (*ibid.*).

OCHA

At the operational and policy level, OCHA's role in information management is also important to mention. In addition to reliefweb and IRIN, OCHA also hosts a Communications and Information Services Branch to support OCHA's capacity to manage and use information for policy and advocacy purposes. It works with donors and other UN member states, the IASC, cluster leads, the NGO community, international media, as well as think tanks,

research and academic centres and humanitarian information networks more broadly. Within it, the Communications Services Section is tasked with formulating OCHA's communication and outreach strategy, while the Information Services Section ensures the information required to inform this is available. It seeks to build long-term partnerships with information providers in order to ensure predictable information flows. The Technologies Section manages infrastructure to ensure efficient flow of information from headquarters to the field and vice versa. The Telecommunications Partnership Unit seeks to support coordination efforts in this area, including with the private sector, while the Web Services Section manages OCHA's use of networking platforms including blogs. Finally it also supports humanitarian coordination efforts through its role as inter-cluster coordinator. The Emergency Relief Coordination Centre for example is a platform for operational information exchange in sudden-onset disasters. The Field Coordination support section supports the establishment of structures in the field to manage this exchange, including Humanitarian Information Centres (HICs) for example. (See: <http://ochaonline.un.org/Coordination/FCSS/FieldCoordinationSupportSection/tabid/1411/language/en-US/Default.aspx>).

AlertNet

AlertNet also emerged out of the Rwanda Genocide and is an initiative of the Reuters Foundation that was established in 1997 out of an interest in addressing poor coordination between operational agencies. It seeks to deliver critical operational information to humanitarian agencies worldwide, encourage information-sharing amongst humanitarian actors and raise awareness of humanitarian crises amongst the general public (AlertNet).

A notable initiative includes a 2004 analysis of humanitarian crisis reporting which resulted in the Fritz Report, a survey of relations between the media and humanitarian agencies. With support from DFID, Alertnet is implementing the recommendations arising from the report including creating a database of crisis briefings, country statistics, a 'who works where' directory, a newsletter on early warning for journalists, as well as a range of other tools include emergency mapping and online training modules. AlertNet is open to membership, and is seeking to recruit national NGOs in particular to its membership (AlertNet).

It has made efforts to define the scope of humanitarian action that it covers, focusing less on recovery and more on early warning and on-going humanitarian crises. It also distinguishes between four types of crises, namely health, sudden-onset, food-related emergencies as well as conflict, while recognising that they overlap. elsewhere in the media - so-called 'forgotten'

or 'hidden' emergencies. According to a 2005 survey, 40% of Alertnet's users are aid workers, followed by students, the media, academics and government officials (AlertNet).

Making Sense of Darfur

Finally, there are a great number of information networks dedicated to promoting a particular message on humanitarian crises and response. These range from the more informal, such as blogs for example, to the more formal, such as academic and more-research oriented forms of collaboration. Alex de Waal's *Making Sense of Darfur* could be described as a blend of the two. It is hosted by the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), an independent non-profit organization dedicated to social

science, where De Waal is a research director. Its objectives are to build interdisciplinary and international networks amongst social scientists through for example workshops or research consortia and scholarly exchanges. It focuses on a number of themes including global security and cooperation, knowledge institutions, migration, risk, religion, international affairs, and HIV/AIDS. Launched in 2007, *Making Sense of Darfur* provides analyses of the crises in Darfur and Sudan more broadly. Alex de Waal is the lead contributor to the blog but it also sees frequent inputs from a range of academics, students, policy makers, as well human rights and political activists (see <http://blogs.ssrc.org/sudan/>). The blog also provides links to other sites discussing humanitarian topics.

Figure 1a: Supporting policy making and policy implementation: examples of formal and informal networks

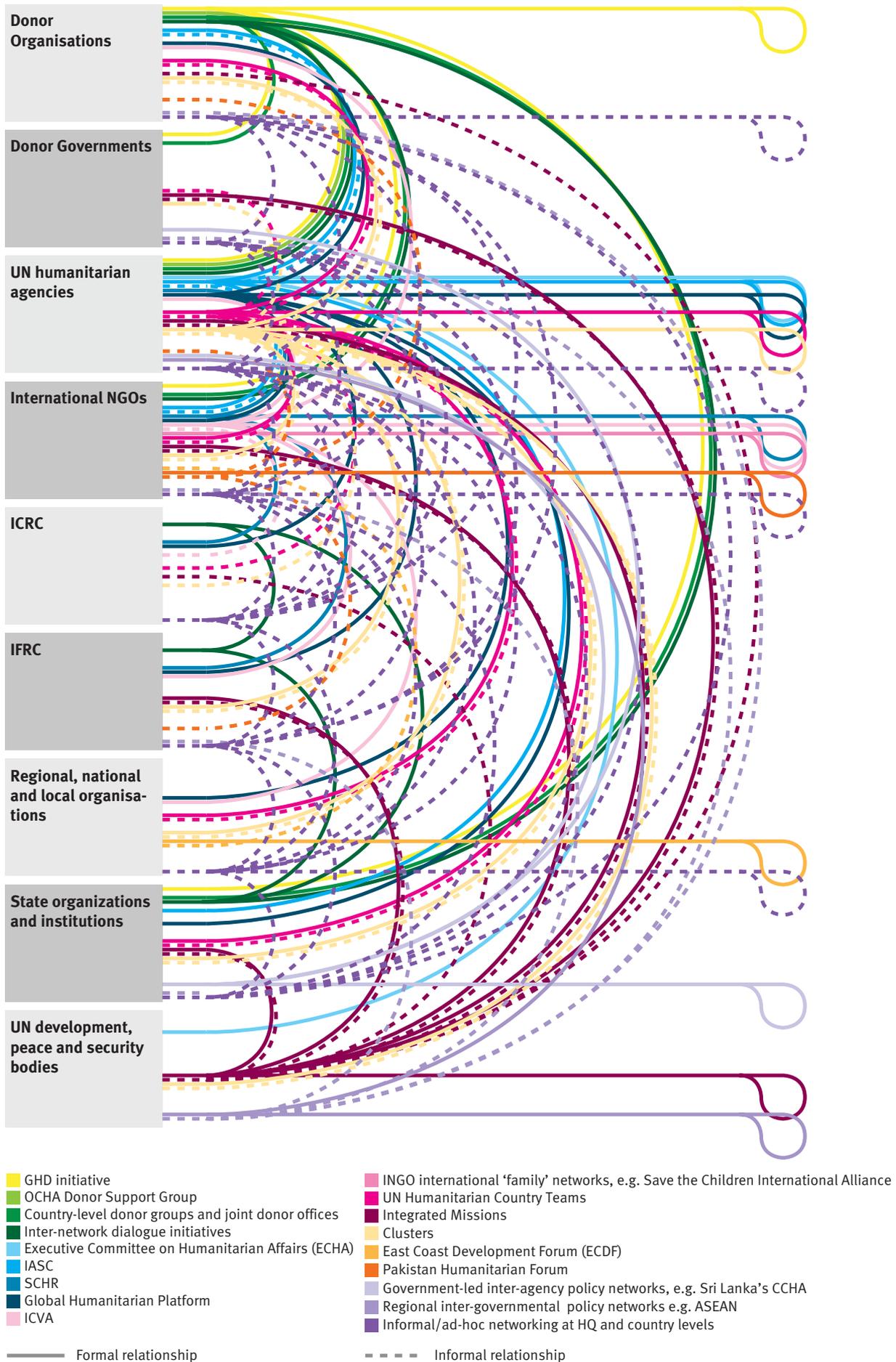


Figure 1b – FORMAL: Supporting policy making and policy implementation: examples of formal networks

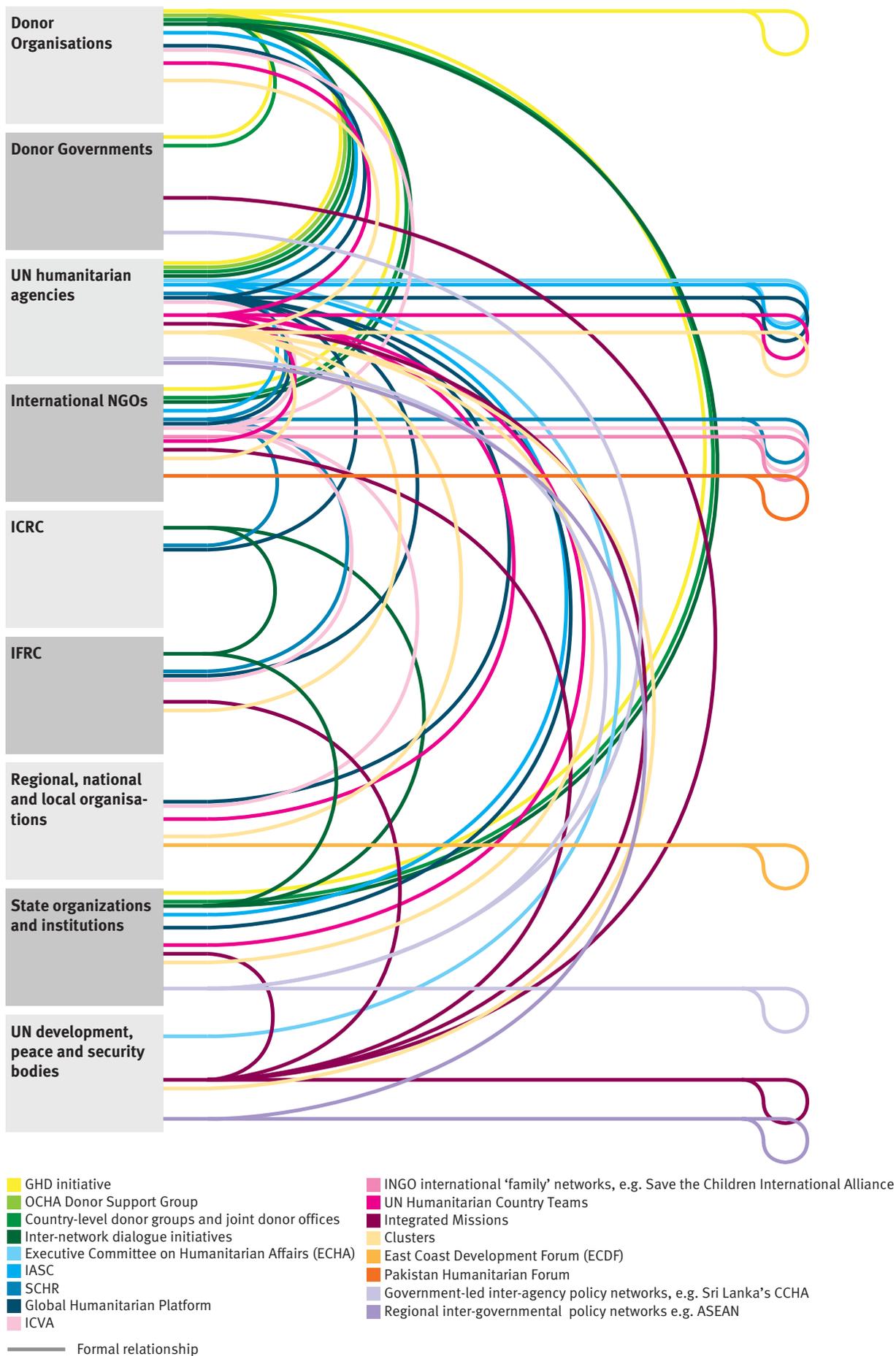


Figure 2a: Directly supporting humanitarian action and strategies on the ground: examples of formal and informal networks

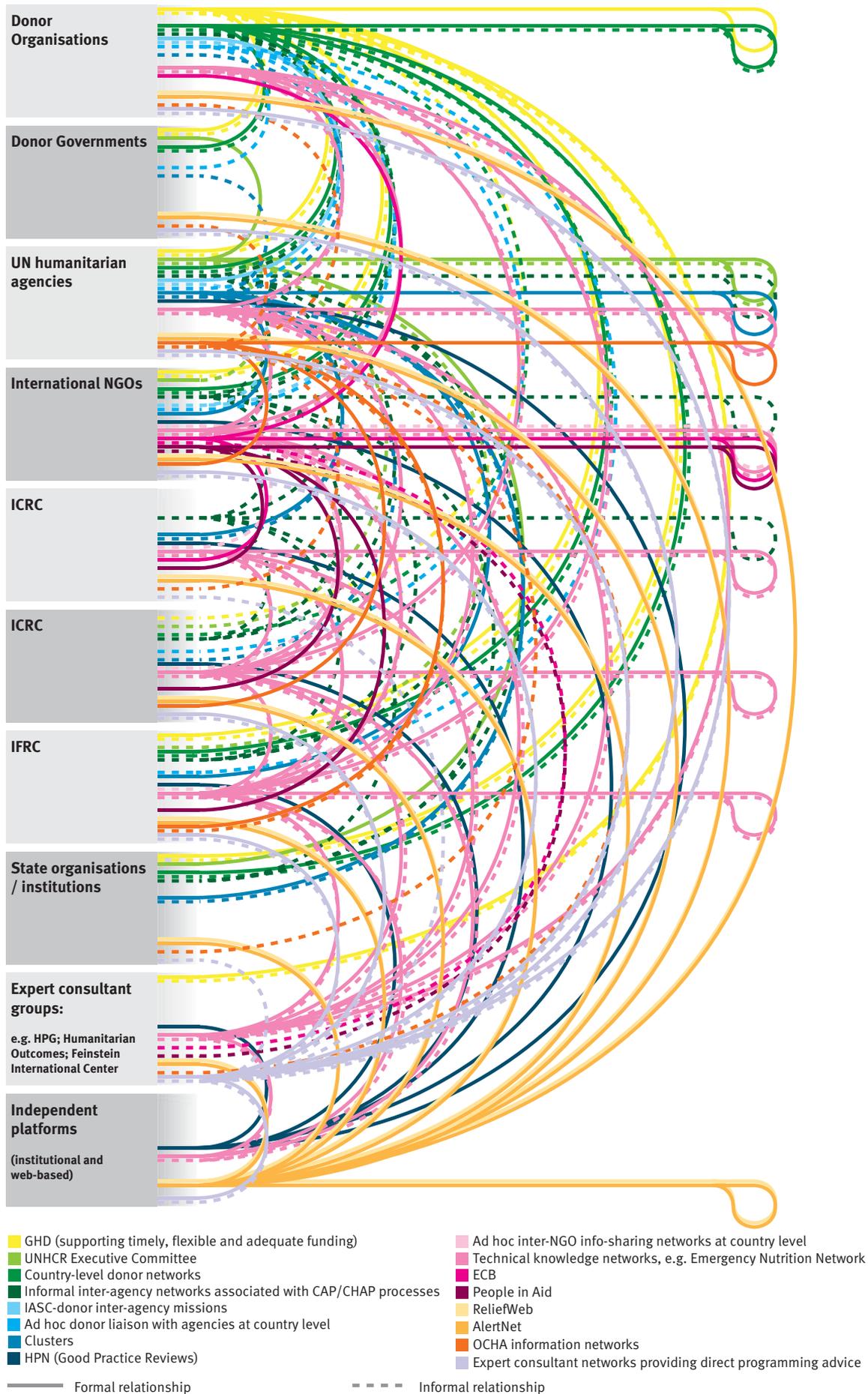


Figure 2b – FORMAL): Directly supporting humanitarian action and strategies on the ground: examples of formal networks

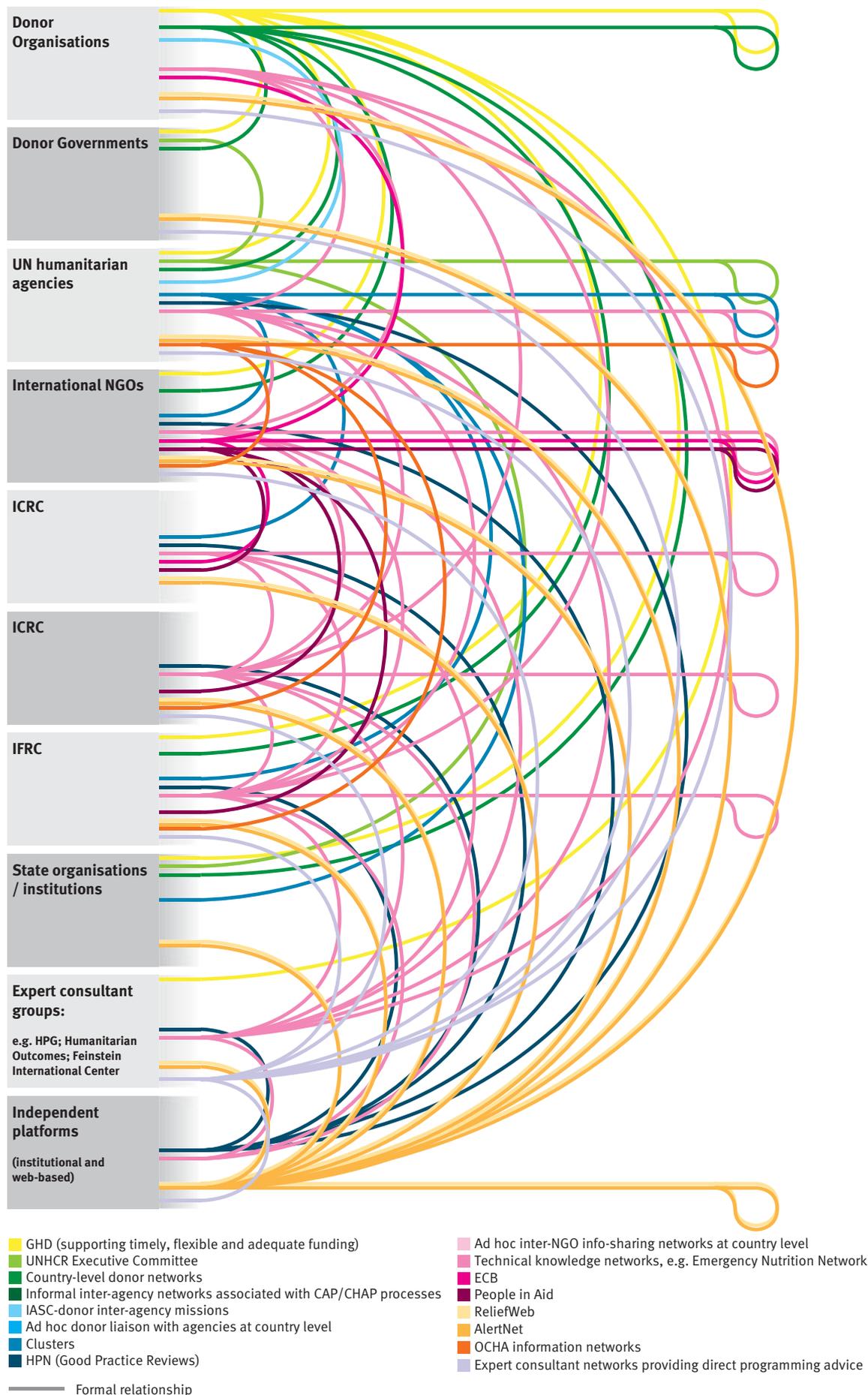


Figure 3a: Developing usable knowledge and influencing policy and practice: examples of formal and informal networks

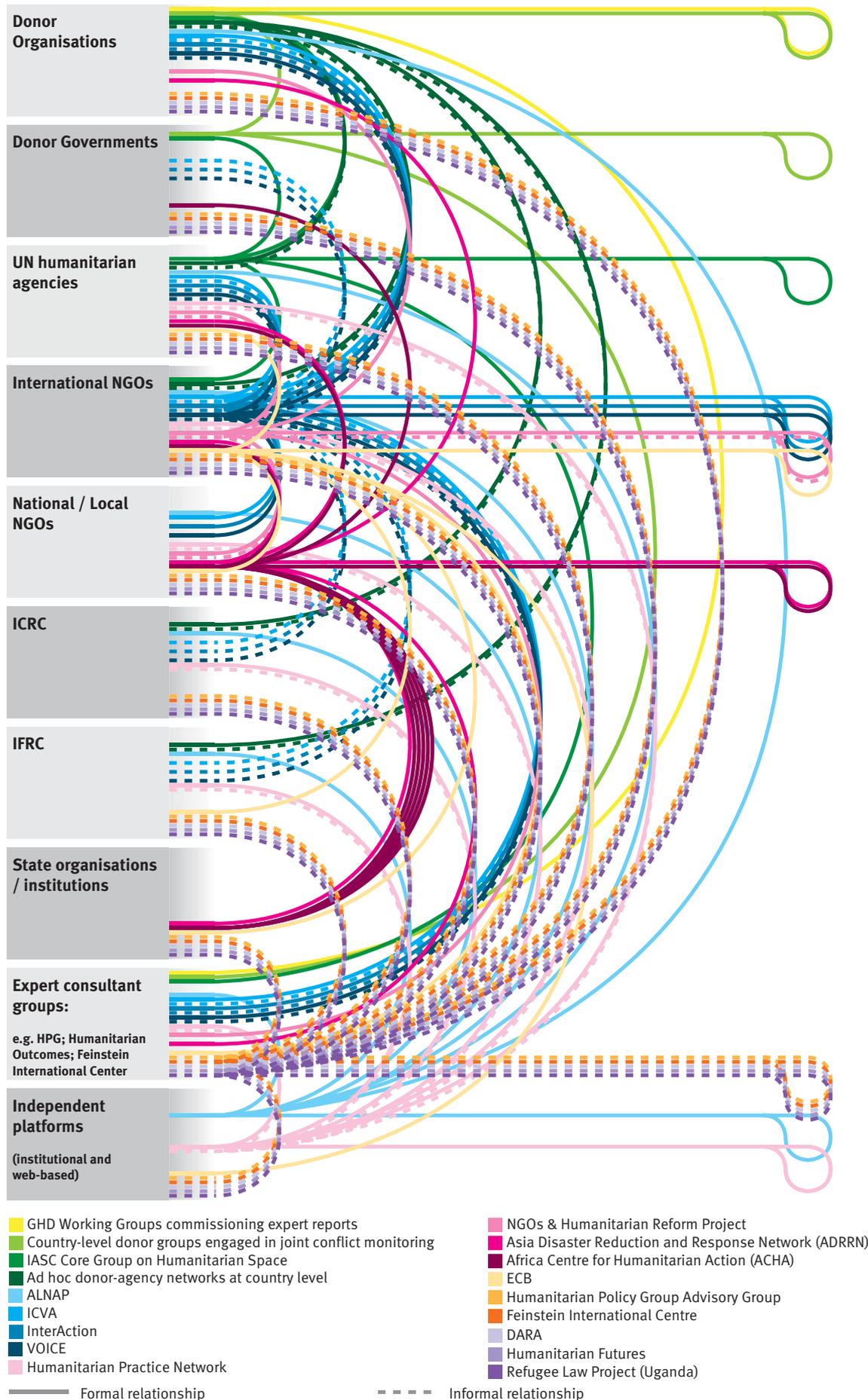


Figure 3b – FORMAL): Developing usable knowledge and influencing policy and practice: examples of formal networks

