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Strengthening Accountability to Affected Populations through Network Learning

Jo-Hannah Lavey and
Louise Searle,
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Authors

Jo-Hannah Lavey, with Louise Searle of Humanitarian Advisory Group

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Executive Summary

Strengthened accountability to affected populations is central to humanitarian action. While much has been achieved, there is also considerable scope to further improve accountability to people affected by conflict and disaster. Across a broad spectrum of networks (global, regional, national and sub-national) this study found evidence that network learning contributes to improved AAP practice, and has the potential to contribute further.

Humanitarians establish and engage in networks when they are relevant, useful, and provide concrete learning opportunities to improve practice in AAP. The examples of promising practice in this study demonstrate instances where network learning has led to improved accountability to people affected by conflict and disaster via more coordinated approaches, contextualisation of resources, and innovative information-sharing techniques.

Learning and improved practice is most likely to happen when networks contextualise approaches to accountability and support practical implementation. Important functions raised in this study include translation and adaptation of tools and resources, addressing national and local challenges and providing mentoring and coaching support. Global, national and sub-national networks contribute to this learning and improved practice, and regional networks may provide the best opportunity to facilitate those linkages.

Factors contributing to the success of networks identified in this study include active contribution of network members and support from external stakeholders, particularly those holding senior leadership positions. A diverse membership base, the ability of network members to dedicate sufficient time, sharing of resources, joint-problem-solving and a level trust that encourages reflection on challenges and mistakes as well as good practice were all identified as necessary for success.

To harness the potential for humanitarian networks to strengthen learning and AAP practice, networks need to define their purpose and related functions considering the reasons why people engage, how they will most effectively learn and which factors need to be in place to ensure success. This study suggests external actors can best support AAP networks in fulfilling this purpose by channelling technical advice, funding, and support that aligns with member-led strategies.

1. Introduction

In the lead up to the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit the humanitarian community is exploring what it means to be effective in response, how to reduce vulnerability and better manage risk, how to accelerate change and transform through innovation, and how to better serve the needs of people in conflict.¹ Within this agenda is a need for strengthened accountability to affected populations. As humanitarian actors diversify and technology and social media provide unprecedented opportunity for connectivity and collaboration, it is timely to better understand the role that networks and network learning can play in improving accountability to affected populations.

This report examines why and how humanitarians are using networks to exchange knowledge and experience in the practice of AAP. By exploring examples of promising practice generated within networks, the report highlights the potential for networks to strengthen accountability to people affected by conflict and disaster.

The report begins by providing a brief overview of AAP and outlines current practice trends. Next, it highlights the role of networks in promoting learning about AAP, drawing on what is known about networks as successful mechanisms for learning from the literature and key informant responses. The report concludes by exploring ways in which learning about AAP practice could be further strengthened within humanitarian networks, with the hope this will lead to improved accountability to aid recipients.

The study identifies three promising practice examples to demonstrate learning and action through networks to improve AAP. The first example looks at AAP practice in the Typhoon Haiyan response, demonstrating how networks can support a more coordinated and coherent approach to AAP across the entire response. The second example showcases the Pakistan Accountability & Learning Working Group (ALWG) as an example of a sustainable country-level network that links local and global initiatives. The third example is from Sierra Leone, where a network of humanitarian agencies are implementing a new consolidated approach to collecting data from affected populations, and consequently offering real opportunity to influence senior decision-making processes across the entire response. The **promising practice** examples support key findings including the importance of networks being relevant and useful, and of network functions supporting applied learning. In two of the examples the role of translating and contextualising resources is highlighted as critical to transforming learning into changed practice.

¹ <http://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org> [accessed 27 November 2014].

2. Accountability to Affected Populations

There is cause for optimism

Accountability to people affected by conflict, crisis and disaster has been on the agenda of humanitarian actors for more than two decades.² Today it seems almost unthinkable to plan and lead a humanitarian response without putting crisis-affected populations at the heart of that response.³ The number of global quality and accountability initiatives⁴ are testament to a considerable and concerted effort to strengthen accountability with hope that by doing so, both quality of response and humanitarian outcomes will be improved.⁵

Donors, multilaterals and non-government organisations agree that accountability to aid recipients is vitally important⁶ and field-based accountability mechanisms are becoming the 'norm rather than the exception'.⁷

There is good reason to have some optimism about current practice. A body of knowledge is building, generated in part by well-documented field-based case studies⁸ and facilitated by prominent bodies and networks such as the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP), Sphere Focal Points based in crisis-affected regions and countries, URD's Quality Compass and the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP).⁹ There are increasing opportunities for context-specific learning. For example, a series of regional workshops facilitated by ICVA in Beirut, Amman, Dakar and Bangkok in 2014 provided a learning platform for national and international humanitarian practitioners to share their experiences and challenges integrating quality and accountability into humanitarian programming.¹⁰

Emerging evidence links accountability mechanisms with humanitarian effectiveness, both in terms of achieving project objectives and broader impacts such as empowering communities.¹¹ The inter-agency evaluation of the humanitarian response to Typhoon Haiyan highlighted the success of Communications with Communities (CwC) and AAP

² See for example Steering Committee of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda; (1996). The International response to conflict and genocide: lessons from the Rwanda experience : joint evaluation of emergency assistance to Rwanda.

³ Ambassador Manuel Bessler Vice-Director, Delegate for Humanitarian Aid and Head of the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit (SHA) in HAP; (2013) 2013 Humanitarian Accountability Report, HAP: Geneva, foreword.

⁴ Cosgrove, J; (2013) Humanitarian Standards: Too much of a good thing? <http://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/node/429613> [accessed 03 December 2014]. Also see HAP (2013) '2013 Humanitarian Accountability Report' HAP: Geneva 23, 43, 48, 52.

⁵ HAP; (2013), '2013 Humanitarian Accountability Report.' HAP: Geneva.

⁶ Brown, D. & Donini, A. (2014) 'Rhetoric or reality? Putting affected people at the centre of humanitarian action,' ALNAP/ODI: London 9; Featherstone, A. (2013) 'Improving Impact: Do Accountability Mechanisms Deliver Results?, A Joint Christian Aid, Save the Children, Humanitarian Accountability Partnership Report', June 2013.

⁷ Featherstone,A; (2013) Improving Impact: Do Accountability Mechanisms Deliver Results? A Joint Christian Aid, Save the Children, Humanitarian Accountability Partnership Report, June 2013, 9.

⁸ See for example ALNAP and CDA Collaborative Learning Project's research project into what makes humanitarian feedback mechanisms effective. <http://www.alnap.org/feedback-loop> [accessed December 28, 2014].

⁹ <http://www.hapinternational.org/>; <http://www.sphereproject.org/about/focal-points/>; <http://www.alnap.org/> [accessed 28 December 2014].

¹⁰ ICVA, (2014), Workshop Report: Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP).

¹¹ Featherstone,A; (2013) Improving Impact: Do Accountability Mechanisms Deliver Results? A Joint Christian Aid, Save the Children, Humanitarian Accountability Partnership Report, June 2013, 5.

mechanisms at gathering feedback across the entire humanitarian response – a significant step forward from the sector and agency-specific feedback mechanisms characterising previous international responses.¹²

Scope for continuing improvement

Despite these positive gains there is considerable scope to further improve accountability to people affected by conflict and disaster.¹³ Implementation of accountability mechanisms has been described as ‘patchy’ with some organisations focusing on delivering donor and organisational requirements for accountability rather than listening and responding to the needs of communities affected by crisis.¹⁴ While the Typhoon Haiyan example of an integrated multi-agency feedback and response mechanism offers hope of a more coordinated and coherent approach to accountability, it is not yet clear whether this represents the beginning of a new trend or remains an isolated pocket of promising practice, particularly as Haiyan was a natural disaster with successes not available in conflict crises. An evaluator of the humanitarian response to the Syrian crisis, for example, was advised of more than 150 feedback hotlines across Lebanon alone, suggesting considerable duplication of efforts and mechanisms administered by individual agencies.¹⁵ Further, accountability to affected populations is not yet well integrated into the cluster approach for humanitarian coordination.

Establishing evidence of ‘what works’ in humanitarian action is recognised as necessary for effectiveness and for accountability.¹⁶ However often activities that fall under the rubric of ‘accountability’ are under-evaluated in humanitarian response, and evidence linking accountability initiatives to effectiveness and better humanitarian outcomes is limited.¹⁷

There are also factors impeding implementation of AAP at a field level. Participants in this study identified **three main implementation challenges**: human resource capacity, technical capability and organisational culture. Dedicated capacity early on in a response was highlighted as critical to implementation of AAP, however the pool of qualified technical advisors is small – and smaller still for specialised areas such as investigation of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse. Participants noted the availability of relevant tools and resources, but found them hard to navigate. Leadership, attitudinal and organisational change were all identified as necessary elements to achieve traction on AAP within humanitarian organisations.¹⁸

¹² Hanley, T; Binas, R; Murray, J and Tribunalo, B; (2014), IASC Inter-agency Evaluation of the Typhoon Haiyan Response, viii.

¹³ Interview participants; HAP (2013) ‘2013 Humanitarian Accountability Report’ HAP: Geneva; Brown, D. & Donini, A. (2014) ‘Rhetoric or reality? Putting affected people at the centre of humanitarian action,’ ALNAP/ODI: London.

¹⁴ ALNAP (2010) ‘State of the Humanitarian System’, cited in HAP ‘2013 Humanitarian Accountability Report’ HAP: Geneva 22.

¹⁵ Personal communication, November 2014.

¹⁶ See Knox-Clarke, P. and Darcy, J; (2014) *Insufficient evidence? The quality and use of evidence in humanitarian action*. ALNAP Study. London: ALNAP/ODI, 5.

¹⁷ McGee, R. (2013) ‘Aid Transparency and Accountability: ‘Build It and They’ll Come’?’, *Development Policy Review*, vol. 31 no.1, 107.

¹⁸ Interview with research participants including a consultant and network lead; Jacobs, A. & Wilford, R. (2010) ‘Listen First: A Pilot System for Managing Downward Accountability in NGOs’, *Development in Practice* 20 (1): 809.

Another major area for improvement identified within the literature and raised by participants in this study is the way in which information gathered through communication and accountability mechanisms is utilised. While data gathered through initiatives such as two-way communication and feedback mechanisms is increasingly used to improve project implementation and quality, the information is not being fully utilised to inform strategic decision-making at a programmatic, policy or organisational level.¹⁹ Responsibility for humanitarian accountability has also been located within humanitarian agencies, potentially undermining the legal responsibilities of official duty bearers.²⁰ Consequently, the focus of current practice sometimes obscures the bigger picture of accountability for people affected by conflict and disaster – the right to access dignified humanitarian assistance and protection for those most in need.²¹

The link between the term ‘accountability’ and the activities often associated with AAP such as information provision, participation and feedback has also been challenged. One participant in this study strongly argued that while such activities are ways of taking affected populations’ perspectives into account and may be important for effective programming, they do not necessarily lead to or result in accountability. Rather, accountability is about holding providers of aid to account – whether humanitarian, government or others such as those within the private sector. As an example, most services provided in developed countries have few participation components in their development and delivery, yet there are clear mechanisms for holding service providers to account. Feedback mechanisms may have the potential to hold aid providers to account, but evidence is not yet clear that they consistently do.²²

Within the context of current practice, networks are emerging as important vehicles for learning about and improving implementation of AAP in response to crises. The following section explores what networks exist to support AAP practice, why staff use networks for learning and how humanitarians are currently using networks to learn about AAP.

¹⁹ Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (2013); 2013 Humanitarian Accountability Report, 1.

²⁰ Ibid, 8.

²¹ Ibid.

²² See for example evidence that components of AAP including feedback mechanisms improve the quality of humanitarian assistance in Featherstone, A. (2013) ‘Improving Impact: Do Accountability Mechanisms Deliver Results?’ HAP, Christian Aid and Save the Children, and concerns that feedback mechanisms can reduce program quality by potentially displacing more meaningful participation and engagement in Jean, I. & Bonino, F. (2013) ‘We are committed to listen to you: World Vision’s experience with humanitarian feedback mechanisms in Darfur,’ ODI/ALNAP: London: 30.

3. Network Learning

What networks exist to support AAP practice?

There are a number of networks that exist to support, in whole or in part, knowledge sharing, learning and action on AAP. They operate at country levels, as well as within regions and, as highlighted in the text box below, globally.

Global networks identified by study participants contributing to strengthened AAP

- Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP)
- Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC)
- Emergency Capacity Building Project (ECB) (now complete)
- Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD)
- Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP)
- Inter-Agency Standing Committee Accountability to Affected Populations and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Task Team (IASC AAP and PSEA Task Team)
- International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)
- Senior Transformative Agenda Implementation Team
- Sphere focal points
- People in Aid

At the regional and country levels, ICVA has facilitated workshops in the Middle East and North Africa, West and Central Africa, and Asia to encourage sharing of contextualised knowledge and experiences of AAP. The Sphere Project engages in regional Sphere partnerships, which support national agencies to strengthen quality and accountability initiatives and promote Sphere activities within their region.²³ Humanitarian Accountability Partnership also plans to scale-up its regional engagement with the creation of joint regional learning events.²⁴

Country level networks addressing a range of accountability issues exist in countries including Japan, Pakistan, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Kenya and most recently, in Lebanon. The Sphere Focal Point system also operates at a country level²⁵ supporting and strengthening self-establishing networks. For example Sphere partnerships in Asia are maintained with a diverse range of country focal points including organisations, academic institutions, networks and working groups to increase local ownership of Sphere. Engagement with stakeholders such as governments and the private sector has been a

²³ The Sphere Project Strategy for working with regional partners, country focal points and resource persons, January 2013, 6. <http://www.sphereproject.org/silo/files/sphere-focal-points-strategy.pdf> [accessed 12 January 2015].

²⁴ HAP; (2013); *HAP Strategy 2014-2016*, 11. <http://www.hapinternational.org/pool/files/Strategy%202014-2016%20Final%20approved%2006%20Dec%202013%281%29.pdf> [accessed 12 January 2015].

²⁵ <http://www.sphereproject.org/news/sphere-community-growing-stronger-in-asia/> [accessed 2 December 2014].

priority for focal points and increasingly humanitarian standards are being incorporated into government frameworks for disaster management including funding platforms.²⁶

Formal and informal networks, at both a national and sub-national level, are sometimes established during crisis response. The text box below provides examples of networks established during Typhoon Haiyan:

*Formal and informal networks established during crisis response:
Typhoon Haiyan*

- Joint Accountability to Affected Populations and Communications with Communities Working Group, supported by technical advisors
- Church World Service and the Lutheran World Federation sent two AAP advisors who brought peers together through training and technical support, this included joint peer editing, which helped NGOs to learn from each other
- Informal networks formed as a product of workshops held by a university-led project on communications in disasters

From time to time broader humanitarian networks established at global, regional and national levels incorporate elements of quality and accountability within their overall focus. Examples include the Humanitarian Practice Network (institutionally located at the Overseas Development Institute), the African Platform for Humanitarian NGOs, the Disaster Emergency Committee in the United Kingdom, the Pakistan Humanitarian forum (for INGOs) and the National Humanitarian Network in Pakistan (for LNGOs).

Key informants interviewed for this report also highlighted that networks internal to organisations—both informal and formal—are also important sources of technical support and learning. Advice and resources from colleagues as well as resources hosted on internal knowledge management hubs were identified as contributing to strengthened AAP practice.

Why use networks for learning on Accountability to Affected Populations

Evidence suggests that networks contribute to learning,²⁷ foster innovation and spread new ideas and technologies.²⁸ The value of these functions is increasingly recognised by humanitarians who continue to seek involvement in networks, often investing considerable time and energy to establish networks to address specific issues identified in the field or

²⁶ Sphere Focal Point Forum Report 14-15 October 2014, Bangkok, Thailand, 1.

²⁷ Powell (1990) cited in S. Hearn & E. Mendizabal, *Not Everything that Connects is a Network Background Note*, Overseas Development Institute, 2011, p.1.

²⁸ Tidd and Bessant (2011), Owen-Smith and Powell (2004) and Rogers (2010) cited in K. Scriven, (2013) *A Networked Response? Exploring National Humanitarian Networks in Asia*, London: ALNAP, 7.

across the humanitarian community. In most cases, country-based AAP networks have been established in response to an expressed need in the field²⁹ suggesting people want and use networks as a consequence of their perceived relevance and utility. Needs identified in this study include sharing resources contextualised for the local environment, drawing on experience implementing AAP in the country of operation, and coordinating with other humanitarian actors for a more coherent AAP response. Local NGOs may join networks to access accountability tools and to facilitate partnerships with resource agencies, while international NGOs and multilaterals learn from the knowledge of local NGOs and identify partners. Donor and government demands for accountability have also been an important factor driving participation and learning in networks.³⁰

An international NGO, in conjunction with Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) initiated the creation of the Lebanon AAP Community of Practice (CoP).³¹ With the support of HAP, the CoP was established with a membership of six NGOs and is co-chaired by Makhzoumi Foundation, a local NGO. Reasons for creating and engaging in the CoP are twofold: to explore and learn about how members are implementing accountability systems and to find harmonised approaches for Complaints and Response Mechanisms.³²

Some key informants interviewed for this report raised the particular relevance and usefulness of AAP networks to 'new' humanitarian actors. Military and private sector actors in the Philippines and private sector companies in Sri Lanka were highlighted as among those benefitting from engagement in AAP networks and continue to participate because of the perceived value gained from their engagement. The Peace and Conflict Journalism Network joined the CwC and AAP network in the Philippines, and through learning and support from the network they transformed the way they engaged with communities facilitating a two-way communication flow supporting accountability work. They have recently become the newest member of CDAC, suggesting the value placed on participation in networks.³³

Overall, key informants identified the aim of improving quality and accountability in humanitarian practice as the primary motivation for establishing and participating in AAP networks. This was most strongly communicated by individuals engaged in country-level or response-specific networks.³⁴ Examples shared by participants identified concrete changes in practice that result from, and motivate participation in, network learning:

²⁹ Interview with network member

³⁰ Interview with network member

³¹ At the time of writing, the community of practice had met once to agree on objectives and how it would function.

³² Interview with network member

³³ Interview with network member

³⁴ Interview with network member

- In Sri Lanka the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies contextualised and integrated accountability standards and tools into existing national and local standards. The tools were shared and adopted by local government officials, which subsequently changed the way they responded to emergencies. This then led to a requirement that accountability standards be met by all implementing agencies in a humanitarian response.³⁵
- In India the Sphere network published ‘Turning the Tide’, documenting 38 good practice examples from members that had been competitively selected through site visits and community consultations to cross check the validity of the ‘good practice’ claims. Since publication the network has been tracking examples of good practices being successfully replicated in other contexts.³⁶
- In response to Typhoon Haiyan, the AAP and CwC network helped collect AAP data across the humanitarian response, bringing it to the attention of senior decision makers. The Pamati Kita project contextualised AAP resources and shared them amongst a group of agencies.³⁷ Both activities helped to build a more coordinated and coherent AAP response to the crisis that aimed to collect and respond to the needs of the affected community in a more effective manner. Learning on accountability during the Typhoon Haiyan response has been evident in the response to Typhoon Hagupit with rapid implementation of an information and accountability assessment and quick activation of existing AAP networks.³⁸
- In Sierra Leone the Ground Truth project is operating through a network of humanitarian agencies to collect real-time data from communities affected by Ebola to inform decision-making and improve programming.³⁹

How humanitarians learn through networks

Existing knowledge about *how* people learn derives from disciplines such as education and organisational development, and includes theories about social learning. Researchers such as Bandura and Vygotsky established that social learning occurs by modelling other people’s behaviour and learning from others by example.⁴⁰ Wenger argues learning networks or ‘communities of practice’ involve collective learning in a shared enterprise. More than just a connection between people, a community of practice implies

³⁵ Interview with network member

³⁶ Interview with network member

³⁷ See practice example 1

³⁸ Interview with network member. For further examples see

<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/presscenter/articles/2014/12/08/improved-emergency-communication-blunts-impact-of-typhoon-ruby/> [accessed 13 January 2015].

[accessed 13 January 2015].

³⁹ See practice example 3

⁴⁰ Bandura, A; (1977). *Social Learning Theory*. New York, NY USA: General Learning Press. Vygotsky, L; (1978). *Mind in Society*. Cambridge. M.A: Harvard University Press. Cited by Sie, R.L.L; Patariaia, N; Boursinou, E et al; (2013). “Goals, Motivation for, and Outcomes of personal Learning through Networks: Results of a Tweetstorm”, *Technology & Society*, 16 (3), 59-75.

commitment, shared competence and resources and the development of shared practices.⁴¹

Some of the important functions of networks that may facilitate learning include:

- Problem solving, requests for information, seeking experience, documenting learning, mapping knowledge and identifying gaps⁴²
- Reflective practitioner/action research, empowerment of those with a voice in the networks, peer learning, enhanced abilities to examine and deal with change, a broadened perspective, shared ownership and accelerating and sustaining change.⁴³
- Knowledge management, including gathering, storing and sharing information, knowledge and experience.⁴⁴

The application of these functions to facilitate learning is clear in networks designed in whole or in part, to improve AAP. Key informants for this study emphasised exchange of knowledge, practice and experience, peer-to-peer learning, joint problem solving, and shared repositories of tools and resources as among the most important functions. Contextualisation of materials and tools, including translation, and the importance of follow-up support and action to convert learning into action were also identified as factors critical to support learning and improve AAP practice. For example in the Philippines, the network built up a suite of tools named the 'Common Service Project' that could be used by members to strengthen communication to communities.⁴⁵ Examples of the kind of support that key informants find useful to help implement what they are learning about AAP through networks include mentoring and coaching, peer-to-peer review, and support to quickly navigate and select relevant tools from the numerous resources available.

The ALWG in Pakistan has applied these functions to link the global and the local. It shares global standards, learning and policy developments with country-level members, and shares activities, progress and good practice from the field with global institutions.⁴⁶

What makes a network on Accountability to Affected Populations successful?

A recent ALNAP study exploring national humanitarian networks in Asia found elements contributing to successful networks included: the presence of clear aims and goals; a membership size and composition that creates cohesion and supports its functions;

⁴¹ See generally <http://wenger-trayner.com/theory/> [accessed 30 December 2014]. Also see Wenger, E; (1998). "Communities of Practice: Learning as a Social System", *The Systems Thinker*, 9(5), 5. Cited by Sie, R.L.L.; Pataria, N; Boursinou, E et al; (2013). "Goals, Motivation for, and Outcomes of personal Learning through Networks: Results of a Tweetstorm", *Technology & Society*, 16 (3), 59-75.

⁴² Wenger-Trayner, above n 23.

⁴³ O'Hair, M and Veugele, W; (2005) 'The case for network learning' in *Network Learning for Educational Change* O'Hair, M. and Veugele, W. McGraw-Hill Education, England, 4-7.

⁴⁴ Scriven, K; (2013), *A Networked Response? Exploring National Humanitarian Networks in Asia*, London: ALNAP, 16.

⁴⁵ Interview with network member

⁴⁶ See practice example 2

organisational forms and structures that enable performance; a sustainable funding model that protects independence; transparent governance structures; external linkages with national and international networks; strong leadership based on consensus and humility; and adhering to and promoting humanitarian principles and standards.⁴⁷

This study asked participants to identify what, in their experience, facilitated effective network learning on accountability to affected populations. Analysis of participant responses found key enablers to be:

- An organisation that drives membership and activity
- Sufficient time to participate, contribute and develop resources
- An informal and supportive culture
- Effective meeting platforms (whether online or in person)
- Opportunity to share contextualised experiences, tools and resources
- Organisational commitment including explicit goals, ownership over the agenda, engaging leaders for support and donor demand for more accountable practice; personal commitment also helps.

Unsurprisingly, there are similarities with success factors identified by the ALNAP study described above. In particular an informal, supportive culture found within smaller AAP networks is consistent with the ALNAP finding that relatively small support networks appeared most suited to capturing and sharing knowledge.⁴⁸

AAP networks also valued meeting in person where possible, and diversity in network membership, with interviewees positing that broad membership improved learning for both traditional and non-traditional humanitarian responders. External linkages and support were also important to some key informants, particularly country-based AAP networks such as Sphere India, the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies in Sri Lanka and the Accountability Learning and Working Group in Pakistan. While other success factors in the ALNAP study were not explicitly mentioned, they are aligned with the comments and sentiments expressed by research participants. Generating and maintaining organisational commitment may be a success factor more closely aligned to AAP as key informants reported commitment to AAP can often be dependent on the passion of individuals with broader roles, rather than on a person with a dedicated AAP function.⁴⁹

Members and external actors are essential in supporting and sustaining the work of AAP networks. The following info graphic provides a summary of some of the critical factors identified by research participants.

⁴⁷ K. Scriven, (2013), *A Networked Response? Exploring National Humanitarian Networks in Asia*, London: ALNAP, 2013, p. 37-41.

⁴⁸ K. Scriven, (2013), *A Networked Response? Exploring National Humanitarian Networks in Asia*, London: ALNAP, 2013, p. 38.

⁴⁹ Interview with network member.

How members can support successful network learning on AAP



TIME

Dedicated time to network activities in line with the members' organisational objectives will help to build personal and organisational commitment, for example contributing to the agenda development.

ENCOURAGING BROAD MEMBERSHIP

Supporting LNGOs to participate and contribute should improve the network's ability to contextualise learning. Encouraging other organisations, such as the government or media, may help to extend learning and collaboration opportunities.

SHARING RESOURCES

Sharing translated and contextualised resources is important to encourage others to do the same, reduce overlap of effort, and support organisations who do not have the resources to do so themselves.

REFLECTION AND LEARNING

Being open about mistakes and challenges will help to contribute to a supportive, open environment which best facilitates learning.

COMMITMENT WITHIN ORGANISATIONS

It is important for members to build the knowledge of and commitment to AAP in their own organisation so that support to AAP networks is maintained and practice is changed. This requires engaging leadership and strategically working towards attitudinal and organisational change so that the organisation holistically delivers AAP, makes senior level decisions using AAP data, and does not falter when staff move on.

How external actors can support successful network learning

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Additional capacity in the form of technical advisors, particularly in the early stage of a crisis, can help networks to learn and operate effectively. They can perform functions that require a concerted investment of time, time being a key enabler.

THEY CAN DO THIS BY:

- providing a secretariat function
- developing contextualised resources such as AAP tools for implementation and case studies for learning, this may include leading an AAP needs assessment
- bringing in contextualised knowledge by working with LNGOs, encouraging their participation and facilitating inclusion of their knowledge
- identifying and linking similar AAP activities across a response, bringing a more coordinated and coherent perspective.

FUNDING

Funding can support the deployment of technical advisors, needs assessments and development of contextualised resources and translated materials. This also helps busy aid workers to save time and contributes to contextualisation.

4. Promising practices

The previous section mapped why professionals use networks and how they facilitate learning on AAP; it also identified the ways in which key stakeholders can support this learning. This section provides examples of promising practice from the field that demonstrate learning and action through networks to improve AAP.

Sharing practice examples and case studies are an important way to learn⁵⁰ and improve AAP.⁵¹ Networks can be effective mechanisms for sharing practice examples—for example through annual workshops, such as the 2014 ALNAP Annual Meeting on the engagement of crisis-affected people in humanitarian action; online, such as the HAP's website; or at regular meetings of AAP networks, such as the Pakistan ALWG meetings in Islamabad.⁵²

Three promising practice examples have been selected during this study to demonstrate learning and action through networks to strengthen AAP. Example one discusses AAP practice in the Typhoon Haiyan response, demonstrating how networks can support a more coordinated, coherent, system-wide approach to AAP. The second example presents the Pakistan Accountability Learning and Working group as an example of a sustainable country-level network that is effective locally and also linked into global initiatives. The third example is from Sierra Leone, where a network of humanitarian agencies are implementing a new consolidated approach to collecting data from affected populations, offering real opportunity to influence senior decision-making processes across the entire response.

Example 1: Towards a more coordinated and coherent approach to AAP in the response to Typhoon Haiyan

The response to Typhoon Haiyan, known locally as Yolanda, demonstrated the ability of a network to support a more coordinated approach to AAP, collecting and responding to the needs of the affected community in a more coherent and effective manner. The network also helped ensure AAP data was considered in senior decision-making, right up to the level of Emergency Relief Coordinator.

The deployment of AAP and communications advisors early in the response and establishment of an interagency working group on AAP and Communicating with Communities (CwC) has been judged positively by several evaluations and reviews.⁵³

⁵⁰ <http://www.thecasecentre.org/students/learning/introduction/benefits> accessed [8 January 2015]

⁵¹ Common theme from research participants.

⁵² <http://www.alnap.org/meeting2014>; <http://www.hapinternational.org/resources/resource-library.aspx> [accessed 5 January 2014]; Pakistan ALWG interviewee, 28 November 2014

⁵³ After Action Review for Typhoon Haiyan, OCHA, 2014; ActionAid, CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam GB and Tearfund 2014., Missed Again – making space for partnership in the Typhoon Haiyan response; OCHA, Operational Peer Review and the Draft report of the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Response to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, 2014 cited in The CDAC Network (2014) 'The CDAC Network: Typhoon Haiyan Learning Review', CDAC: London, 8.

However, the initial creation of separate working groups, one for AAP and another for CWC, created unnecessary silos and burden on staff, who attended both meetings.⁵⁴

The joint Working Group established a mechanism to ensure senior leaders were provided with an overview of community views in a way that could influence decision-making.⁵⁵ Community feedback on major issues and their suggestions for improvement were collected from agencies each month via a community feedback form, which also requires agencies to document the data source. Issues were grouped together by sector and discussed at Working Group meetings and the group collectively determined what action to take. Actions were followed up and it has been reported that programming was adjusted as a result of the feedback. The Working Group has been criticised by some for its lack of focus on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) and an orientation towards coordination architecture rather than operational change through agencies attending the meetings.⁵⁶ As with most globally driven coordination mechanisms, the network found it was challenging to attract participation by local and national actors.

An innovative partnership called Pamati Kita, “Let’s Listen Together” was also established during the Haiyan response. It is a partnership between Plan International, World Vision International and the International Organisation for Migration, funded by the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development. The project contextualises international standards for the local response and develops common tools and mechanisms for multiple agencies to use (at least 10 international and 20 local agencies in this initial project). This aims to reduce costs, increase quality and coherence, and strengthen accountability. It helps to fill technical capacity gaps for agencies that don’t have sufficient resources for AAP.

Experience to date indicates the potential usefulness of this approach. While implementation has been slower than hoped,⁵⁷ key informants suggest preparation in advance and early implementation following a crisis could maximise the value of a similar project.

Example 2: A sustainable country level network linking local to global⁵⁸

Community World Service Asia⁵⁹ and other agencies responding to the 2010 floods in Pakistan established the Pakistan ALWG in January 2011, with the objective of establishing a resource hub and critical mass of people working on AAP. This occurred in the context of many quality and accountability issues arising during the response to the floods, and donor demand that ‘accountability’ be incorporated into the program response.

⁵⁴ The CDAC Network (2014) ‘The CDAC Network: Typhoon Haiyan Learning Review’, CDAC: London, 8.

⁵⁵ This description is based on Jacobs, A. (2014) ‘Field Visit Report: Pamati Kita Project, Tacloban, 24-28 November 2014.

⁵⁶ Interviewee working on the response to Typhoon Haiyan, 24 November 2014.

⁵⁷ There was a gap between project planning and confirmation of funding.

⁵⁸ This example is based entirely on reporting from Church World Service Asia.

⁵⁹ Community World Service Asia, formerly Church World Service - Pakistan / Afghanistan, is a new, independent organization.

Community World Service Asia leads the ALWG ensuring meetings are held monthly, and that invites, a consultation-based agenda and minutes are all distributed on time. The role of chair is rotated amongst members and an internet-based hub is hosted by Community World Service Asia to share minutes and AAP resources. Members share experience, resources and local and regional training opportunities and develop contacts enabling coordination outside of meetings. Community World Service Asia shares the latest information on AAP global developments, and facilitates opportunity to contribute to initiatives such as the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR) certification project and the development of the Core Humanitarian Standard.

Sub-ALWGs have been established at regional district levels in response to specific emergencies and are frequently held in Urdu language. The ALWG also links with national networks of national and international NGOs on issues related to quality and accountability.

Community World Service Asia is the Sphere regional partner in Asia, Sphere country focal point for Pakistan and a certified member of HAP, with responsibilities beyond the ALWG to support improved quality and accountability. Community World Service Asia offers training, technical support, accountability audits and assessments on a cost recovery basis to agencies in Pakistan and the region—at a cheaper rate than that offered by agencies based elsewhere. In 2015 the ALWG is planning to evaluate the network and to document case studies of good practice in Pakistan to share outside the ALWG.

The network continues to function more than four years after it was established for a specific emergency. Some of the reasons attributed to the network's sustainability include regular sharing good practices and challenges specific to Pakistan, generation of context-specific, translated resources, connection with global developments and initiatives, participation in regional networks. The key to sustainability of the network is the time, commitment and resources from everyone involved, in particular, the leadership and commitment of Community World Service Asia. The Terms of Reference is clear and updated annually with members. There is a concerted effort to keep meetings interesting and to meet the needs of people who attend with opportunity for organisations to showcase their work and discuss potential solutions to the challenges they face in a shared context. Donor demand for AAP continues to help drive the demand for knowledge and maintain the network itself.

The network is not without challenges. The location of the meetings in Islamabad (except where sub-ALWGs are established) creates participation barriers of time and cost for people based elsewhere. When members who are personally, but not organisationally, committed to the ALWG move on to other roles it can leave a large gap that is difficult to replace. It is also a constant challenge to meet the varied interests of each person.

Example 3: A network of humanitarian agencies producing system-wide, evidence-based, real-time constituent voice⁶⁰

The Ground Truth program in Sierra Leone⁶¹ showcases a new approach to collecting data from affected populations in a way that offers opportunity to influence senior decision-making. Funded by DFID, it works through a network of humanitarian agencies including Child Fund, Plan International, Save the Children and others to produce real-time evidence of community and aid worker perceptions of humanitarian performance within the Ebola response. The data is gathered through surveys, asking a few questions around a set of key perception indicators. Answers provide an indication of the effectiveness of the response, willingness to follow protocols for slowing the spread of the disease, and potential gaps in program design and implementation. Questions are specifically designed to guide action to improve operations.

Data is collected from the Sierra Leone public via SMS, and from frontline workers by phone. It is collated, analysed and provided rapidly to agencies responding to the crisis in the form of a simple visual report. The report is sent to the National Ebola Response Centre and some 20 agencies. Data is collected and made available from the general public each week and from humanitarian workers fortnightly.

By sharing the data in this way, the hope is that transparency and mutual accountability will promote uptake and action, creating a cadre of humanitarians focused on measuring and managing performance against the way people perceive the relevance and outcomes of their work.⁶² It becomes most useful when applied by agencies and donors as a performance management tool. For example, the 4 January 2015 report found a slight improvement in addressing the issue of stigma attached to Ebola, which has been an obstacle to reporting new cases and in dealing with the spread of the disease more generally. This suggests interventions addressing stigma may be starting to have an impact.

The methodology is based on a mix of participatory action research from the development sector and techniques borrowed from customer satisfaction and market research fields in the private sector. Questions are carefully developed with aid workers on the ground to determine which questions will provide the most useful information. It works when there is a need for the data and agencies have an interest in and desire to improve. Management systems need to allow programs to adapt in response to the data collected.

In the project's first month of implementation in Sierra Leone⁶³ Ground Truth has noted data is being well received by agencies, and the issues identified by the surveys resonate with people engaged in the response. Experience in Haiti and Pakistan has shown that

⁶⁰ This example is based entirely on reporting from Ground Truth.

⁶¹ Ground Truth (2014) 'Citizen's views of the Ebola response. Ground Truth survey of the general public: Sierra Leone. Round 5 – 04.01.2014', 4.

⁶² <http://keystoneaccountability.wordpress.com/2014/11/18/would-you-recommend-this-ebola-response-to-a-friend/> [accessed 2 December 2014].

⁶³ The project began in November 2014. This report was written in December 2014.

this is the first step in affecting change—in both countries organisations are using the data to modify their programming. The biggest challenge in implementation is moving from data collection to action on the ground. There is a need for the right incentives for busy responders to take ownership of the evidence and use it to make adjustments to programming.

Acronyms

AAP	Accountability to Affected Populations
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
ALWG	Accountability & Learning Working Group
BOND	British Overseas NGOs for Development
CDAC	Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities Network
CWC	Communications with Communities
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
ECB	Emergency Capacity Building Project
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership
HPN	Humanitarian Practice Network
IASC	CAAP Inter-Agency Standing Committee Commitments to Affected Populations
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
LNGO	Local Non-Government Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PSEA	Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
SCHR	Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response
UN OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNSG	United Nations Secretary-General

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to understand ways in which humanitarian practitioners are learning about AAP through networks and to explore the potential for using networks to further strengthen AAP practice.

A research framework was developed to guide the study, identifying themes and sub-themes. The framework guided all aspects of the study from the literature review and development of semi-structured interview guides through to data analysis and reporting. Findings from the literature review were compared against coded interview data to produce the research report, including trends and conclusions.

The research framework identified three themes:

1. Understanding current AAP practice, including promising practices. Sub-themes: promising practice examples, implementation of the CAAP commitments, trends.
2. Understanding how networks facilitate learning on AAP. Sub-themes: network learning examples, enablers and barriers.
3. Identifying opportunities for ICVA to strengthen network learning and enhance AAP. Subthemes: strategy for strengthening network learning by collecting and disseminating best practice examples, strategy for enhancing AAP through outreach and advocacy at the regional and country level through ICVA's members, recommendations for web-based resources.

Review of relevant literature (secondary data)

Over 300 sources were reviewed for this research, comprising peer-reviewed articles, 'grey' literature (including strategy documents, case studies, research reports, guidelines and procedures and lessons learned) and selected email correspondence between AAP specialists. Documents were coded according to the research focus and themes arising from analysis of trends and obstacles.

Primary data collection and analysis

32 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from 25 organisations were conducted via Skype or phone, with one response submitted by email. Interview questions were based on the research framework, and adjusted for each stakeholder depending on their experience and area of expertise. Four interviews were conducted specifically on examples of promising practice.

Eight categories of stakeholders were interviewed: global AAP practitioners (predominately consultants) (n=4), donor representative (n=1), members of ICVA international civil society representatives (n=10), members of ICVA national civil society representatives (n=5), United Nations staff (n=4), quality and accountability initiatives (n=5), the ICVA Secretariat (n=2), and other established learning networks not already referred to (n=1). 3 people

were engaged in follow-up interviews to gather more detailed information about practice examples.

Limitations

The research brief was wide in scope with a limited timeframe for delivery - 18 days across six weeks. This restricted the breadth and depth of the literature review and ability to triangulate some points through the interviews that were not consistently raised by interviewees themselves. Examples of promising practice were reliant on limited sources.

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www.icvanetwork.org

International Council of Voluntary Agencies

Geneva Office

26-28 Avenue Giuseppe Motta 1202 - Geneva - Switzerland

Tel: +41 (0)22 950 9600 - Fax: +41 (0)22 950 9609

Email: secretariat@icvanetwork.org

www.icvanetwork.org

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