

Humanitarian Outcomes

Humanitarian coordination in the Asia-Pacific region

Study in support of the 2010 OCHA Donor Support Group field mission

An independent team of professionals providing evidence-based analysis and policy consultations to governments and international organisations on their humanitarian response efforts.

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This report is independent and does not necessarily represent the views of OCHA, the ODSG or any of its members.

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Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AIN	Association of International NGOs in Nepal
CAP	Consolidated Appeal Process
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CHF	Common Humanitarian Fund
ERF	Emergency Response Fund
FA	Flash Appeal
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
IASC	Interagency Standing Committee on Humanitarian Affairs
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IDRL	International Disaster Response Law
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
ISDR	International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODSG	OCHA Donor Support Group
OHCHR	United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRCS	Nepal Red Cross Society
NRDF	National Disaster Response Force
RC	Resident Coordinator
ROAP	OCHA Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDAC	United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMIN	United Nations Mission in Nepal
WFP	United Nations World Food Programme

Executive Summary

Introduction. In its role as chair of the OCHA Donor Support Group (ODSG) 2009–2010, the Australian government commissioned this study focusing on humanitarian coordination issues and challenges in the Asia-Pacific region. The study team conducted more than 130 interviews with government and aid agency representatives in Nepal; Indonesia (including with field-level researchers); regional offices in Bangkok, Thailand; and in UN headquarters in New York.

Regional vulnerabilities and capacities. Asia-Pacific is the world's most natural disaster-prone region. Between 2000 and 2008, 40 percent of registered disaster events occurred in the region. It also accounted for a third of the world's ongoing conflicts in 2008. Emerging trends, notably urbanization, climate change, and demographic shifts, are creating new and shifting vulnerabilities to disasters. Due to climate change, delta regions in South, East and South-East Asia are expected to be at risk of increased flooding; food security will be threatened by increased drought; and the small island states in the Pacific will be at increased risk of inundation, storm surges, erosion, and other coastal hazards.

Much of the region has experienced rapid economic growth in recent decades, and a growing number of countries have substantial resources to bring to bear in disaster response. The region has seen substantial progress in strengthening disaster preparedness and national response capacity. There is also growing military capacity for, and involvement in, disaster response throughout the region and a growing role for regional bodies such as ASEAN.

OCHA in the Asia-Pacific. In the Asia-Pacific region, OCHA has a country presence in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, Indonesia, and the Philippines, with a sub-regional office in the Pacific Island of Fiji and a support cell in Papua New Guinea. The regional office in Bangkok, Thailand, with a staff of twenty-five, is primarily charged with providing support to the rest of the region. Globally, the introduction of the cluster approach to sectoral coordination in late 2005 both cemented OCHA's role in field-level coordination and increased expectations to the point where its capacities in the field have been severely stretched in some places, including in the Asia-Pacific. As compared to other regions, OCHA has a particularly small footprint in a vast area having considerable diversity, with particular vulnerability to natural disasters, as well as continuing conflicts. OCHA currently has 172 national and international staff in the Asia-Pacific region compared to 884 in Africa.

Regional and field-level coordination. National disaster-management agencies, sometimes with national militaries, often drive the

coordination of humanitarian response in the region. Recognising this, OCHA is increasingly seeking to develop national capacities for response, to complement efforts to develop the international system's own surge capacity. During relatively high profile disasters, however, such as the 2009 West Sumatra earthquake, OCHA has found it difficult to balance support for greater national leadership with the immediate demands of coordinating a huge influx of international aid actors. The international system tends to default to coordinating international agencies, using English as the operational language, which can marginalize national actors and sometimes leads to parallel government and international responses.

The cluster approach has been largely accepted in the Asia-Pacific region; in the Philippines a cluster coordination system has even been embedded in national legislation. Across the region, the lack of a clear institutional lead, at the global level, for protection in natural disasters has posed problems. Delays in staff deployment at times continue to seriously hinder OCHA's role in field-level coordination.

Leadership. Within the region, attempts to strengthen the leadership role in humanitarian response efforts played by UN Resident Coordinators (RCs) and Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) have been mixed. In Myanmar the acting HC played a crucial role in negotiations with government, highlighting the importance of HC leadership and humanitarian skills. By contrast, in Laos an RC and UN Country Team focused on development and limited in their understanding of emergency issues, were reluctant to switch gears for an emergency, leading to a slow response in the aftermath of Typhoon Ketsana.

Funding. A variety of governments, such as Nepal and Indonesia, have shown a desire for modalities for declaring emergency needs and welcoming international assistance that do not—in their perception—reflect poorly on them or undermine their sovereignty. These political sensitivities speak to a need for innovation in the traditional coordinated processes for mobilizing international aid resources. In recognition, humanitarian financing in the region has seen a shift away from traditional Consolidated Appeal Processes (CAPs) and Flash Appeals (FAs) to a greater reliance on the CERF (Central Emergency Response Fund) and other pooled-funding mechanisms, as well as bilateral funding patterns unique to the region.

Information management. The OCHA regional office has developed a tool for analysing disaster risk called the Global Focus Model which analyses hazards, vulnerabilities, and response capacity at the country level using quantitative indicators. OCHA uses this model to prioritise, to argue for field presence, and to decide where to focus scarce resources. It also helps as OCHA dialogues with partners and donors. At the regional level, OCHA has made increased investments

in data preparedness and has carried out data readiness assessments in a number of contexts.

Experience within the region in successfully coordinating assessments has been mixed. In the West Sumatra response in Indonesia, attempts by OCHA and other agencies to undertake joint rapid needs assessments were problematic. Other recent disaster responses have been more positive. For example, in Myanmar, a joint assessment (PONJA) was seen as enabling a common agreement about needs. OCHA has been less focused on monitoring but this is an area where both OCHA staff and external interviewees felt that OCHA needs to tread carefully to avoid being seen as playing a policing role.

Advocacy. Some respondents felt that OCHA's role in relation to humanitarian advocacy in the region is unclear. However, respondents noted that OCHA's regional office has given strong guidance around the need for international humanitarian agencies to improve engagement with governments and has been a strong advocate for the IFRC's International Disaster Response Law (IDRL) process. There is a tendency both within the region and internationally to neglect conflict-related problems within the Asia-Pacific. OCHA therefore has an advocacy role in continuing to draw attention to neglected conflicts.

Civil-military coordination. National military actors are increasingly engaging in humanitarian activities in the Asia-Pacific region; in many countries militaries are given the mandate to be first responders. OCHA's regional office noted a need for stronger engagement with military actors around their roles in disaster management and preparedness. OCHA and the UN more generally are not well enough resourced to do this effectively. Respondents stated a need to develop greater interoperability between regional military forces and to build upon good experiences with joint exercises. And as region also provides a large proportion of UN peacekeeping forces, there is a need to work with troop-contributing countries on standards.

Preparedness. The OCHA regional office has been closely involved in supporting stronger preparedness, including contingency planning, at national levels. UNDAC personnel, in close dialog with governments, have undertaken preparedness assessments in five countries. OCHA, through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) process, is also making efforts to better integrate disaster management into the development frameworks of governments and the UN. UN Country Teams and Resident Coordinators are being more strictly appraised, bringing greater accountability for the quality of preparedness. OCHA has been using the Global Focus Model to ensure that priority countries have strong contingency plans in place that are regularly updated. There's also a perception on the part of the OCHA regional office that UN Country Teams are starting to have greater

in-country ownership of plans and to better include NGO partners. As ever, there is a danger that contingency planning can become a formulaic exercise and a need to invest further in improving the quality of such processes.

Transition. Conflict-affected countries such as Nepal and Sri Lanka have raised questions about the appropriate way to phase down OCHA's presence. Countries like Indonesia, the Philippines, and Bangladesh, where natural disasters are recurrent, raise different questions concerning the challenge of transition. In countries with frequent natural disasters, a strong argument exists for a permanent OCHA presence and/or innovative ways to continue providing support, such as the introducing Humanitarian Support Units within RC offices.

Conclusion. The growing sensitivities over sovereignty, strength, capacity, and assertiveness of many countries in the Asia-Pacific mean that OCHA needs to continue to adapt and refine how it supports humanitarian coordination. The key strategic task facing OCHA and its humanitarian partners in the Asia-Pacific is to forge stronger and more constructive relationships with governments that support and extend national capacities to assist and protect citizens in times of disaster.

International humanitarian action in general, and OCHA in particular, continue to be needed. The region's vulnerability to natural disasters, the humanitarian consequences of conflicts, and new emerging vulnerabilities relating to climate change all suggest the need for the UN and its humanitarian partners to maintain a capacity to respond. While recent years have seen much improvement in policies, legislation, and rhetorical commitments to disaster management, more support is required from donors and international agencies to effectively put these into practice. The region's growing economic and political importance means that international humanitarian actors need to increase their engagement with key governments (and regional actors), both as potential donors and as shapers of policy on international and regional humanitarian action.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and objectives of the study

In its role as chair of the OCHA Donor Support Group (ODSG) 2009–2010, the Australian government commissioned the research group Humanitarian Outcomes to undertake a study focusing on humanitarian coordination issues and challenges in the Asia-Pacific region,¹ for the purpose of providing background to support the 2010 ODSG field mission. The study team conducted field research on country-level humanitarian coordination in Indonesia and Nepal, and reviewed regional level coordination in Bangkok, Thailand. In addition, headquarters-based background research and interviews were conducted in UN headquarters in New York.

This report provides a synthesis of field and headquarters research findings. It examines the unique set of circumstances, challenges, capacities, and opportunities relating to humanitarian action in the Asia-Pacific region, with a particular focus on the roles of the key regional actors and the United Nations in humanitarian coordination.

1.2 Methodology

The study consisted of a New York-based desk review and field visits to Indonesia, Nepal, and the OCHA regional office in Bangkok. The desk review

1 Defined, for the purposes of this study, as the thirty-seven countries and fourteen territories covered by the OCHA Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP).

consisted of an assessment of recent literature on coordination and OCHA's role and interviews with OCHA staff in New York and Geneva, as well as a small number of representatives of host and donor governments in the region. An interview guide for the field visits was developed. In all, 132 interviews were conducted.

In Indonesia, interviews were conducted with sixty-three people working for NGOs, UN agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, and the Indonesian government in Jakarta and Padang. In Nepal, interviews were conducted with forty-five people working for NGOs, UN agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, and the Nepalese government in Kathmandu. There was not scope within the time available and terms of reference for either field study to consult with the disaster-affected population to get their views on coordination. In Indonesia it was not possible to meet with BNPB (the disaster management authority) at the national level; in Nepal the consultant was not able to meet with the ministry working most closely with OCHA, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA), due to a scheduling problem. It was also not possible to get a detailed understanding of OCHA's coordination efforts in the wake of specific disasters, such as the Koshi floods, without visiting the area, which was outside the scope of work. In Bangkok, interviews were conducted with thirteen people (nine OCHA regional office staff and people from WFP, IFRC, and UNICEF) over two days in Bangkok.

2 Humanitarian needs and challenges in the Asia-Pacific region

2.1 Threats and vulnerabilities

Asia-Pacific is the world's most natural disaster prone region.² Between 2000 and 2008, 40 percent of registered disaster events occurred in the region. Available data suggests that over 98 percent of people killed by natural disasters worldwide in 2008 were in the Asia-Pacific region.

In 2008, the region accounted for a third of the world's ongoing conflicts and had roughly 3.3 million IDPs. Many of these conflicts are characterised by protracted but low-intensity fighting resulting in long-term displacements and have received little international attention despite the severity of conditions. For example, in the Philippines there were 600,000 IDPs in Mindanao in 2008.

Emerging trends, notably urbanization, climate change, and demographic shifts are starting to create new vulnerabilities to disasters. Massive urbanisation and the growth of mega cities in low-lying flood plains and/or earthquake zones create an increasing risk of disasters in urban areas, of which the recent cyclones in Manila in 2009 are an example. In Nepal, where Kathmandu is ranked first in earthquake risk amongst all cities in the world,³ government and international agencies have begun to appreciate the very high likelihood of a major earthquake and its potentially devastating consequences given the population density and lack of building codes. The mega-cities of Asia in the Himalayan belt—China, Indonesia, and the Philippines—are prime candidates for a one million-plus fatality earthquake event.

Climate change will create growing challenges. Delta regions in South, East, and South-East Asia are expected to be at risk of increased flooding; food

2 OCHA (2009f) has drafted an internal paper on regional trends and implications on which this section largely draws.

3 IASC Nepal, *Needs Analysis Framework, Key Findings* (Kathmandu, September 2008), 34.

security will be threatened by increased drought; and the small island states in the Pacific will be at increased risk of inundation, storm surges, erosion, and other coastal hazards.

Demographic trends mean that the region as a whole will have an increasingly elderly population. In the last forty years, life expectancy in China has risen by thirty-one years, in the Philippines by twenty-one years, and in Bangladesh by twenty years. Just over half of the world's older people currently live in Asia but, by 2050, Asia will be home to almost two-thirds of the world's older population.

Many of the natural disasters in the region create small- and medium-scale emergencies, which the tools of the international system are ill equipped to deal with because of the current fairly cumbersome appeal process that must be completed before significant resources can be mobilised. This is particularly the case for countries or sub-regions within countries that do not already have an established presence of international aid agencies. At the moment there is often either a large international response to major disasters with an influx of agencies or very little international support. There is a need for better and more flexible tools for responding to small- and medium-scale disasters and for maintaining a balance between capacities to respond to small- and medium- as well as large-scale disasters.

2.2 Increasing capacities

Much of the region has experienced rapid economic growth in recent decades and a growing number of countries have substantial resources to bring to bear in disaster response. The region has seen substantial progress in strengthening disaster preparedness and national response capacity. Of

the thirty-seven countries covered by the OCHA regional office, thirty-six have established national disaster management authorities (Myanmar being the exception) that have been given the mandate to build capacity and coordinate domestic response activities. There is also growing military capacity for, and involvement in, disaster response throughout the region.

2.3 Small country and island state challenges

As well as having some of the largest and most populous countries in the world, the Asia-Pacific region has some of the smallest, which bring their own humanitarian challenges. For example, in Bhutan there is no Red Cross Society, few NGOs, and a very small UN Country Team; this created difficulties in the response to Cyclone Aila in May 2009 and an earthquake in September 2009.

Modalities of work must be different in small island states in the Pacific where there is often no UN presence, tiny populations, governance challenges, and huge logistical impediments. WFP, for instance, has no Pacific presence. Disaster response capacities are spread across the region and are often led by regional or other powers (France, Australia, New Zealand, and the USA) that play a critical role. Countries such as the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and the Federated States of Micronesia are unlikely to have the capability to develop and sustain national capacities in key areas of disaster management. There has to be a more regional approach to capacity building through institutions such as the Pacific Island Forum and there is a need for better analysis at sub-regional levels. OCHA has initiated a process of regional inter-agency contingency planning for humanitarian assistance through the Pacific Humanitarian Team.

3 International humanitarian response in the Asia-Pacific region

The growing strength, capacity, and wealth of many Asia-Pacific countries necessitates a shifting role for international humanitarian action and coordination agencies. Countries in the region have always been particularly concerned to protect the sovereign and territorial rights of disaster-affected states. As OCHA (2009) has recognised, “to be accepted in times of crisis, international response tools must be perceived to support national efforts building on existing partnerships.” Governments in the region are starting to shift expectations of international assistance from acute emergency response to one emphasizing support for preparedness, contingency planning, and early recovery efforts.

Echoing a global trend, the rhetoric on disaster preparedness is far ahead of reality in the Asia-Pacific region. International actors and Asian-Pacific governments have increasingly called attention to

the importance of strengthening national capacities for disaster response and developing relationships with national disaster-management authorities. However, huge variations remain between what is established in principle and what happens in practice. Aspirational commitments by governments have often outstripped capacity for implementation on the ground. The difficulties of stronger engagement by the international community with governments have been seen in recent aid responses in the region. In Nepal, for example, not all cluster leads have fully engaged with their government counterparts; the lack of support within the government, following the Ministry of Finance’s resistance to the 2010 Appeal, is seen by the RC/HC as evidence of these shortcomings. The OCHA Regional Office for the Asia and the Pacific (ROAP) noted that the tools of the international system haven’t been designed to

encourage government engagement; this remains a challenge.

There is also a growing cooperation, and possibly a coordination, role for regional bodies. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has appointed a humanitarian coordinator and formed the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (ADMER). The response to Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar and the critical role played by ASEAN within the Tripartite Core Group (TCG) demonstrates the importance of engagement with regional entities.

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Pacific Island Forum (PIF), Pacific Islands Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC), and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) are also potential interlocutors for regional disaster-management coordination. It is also important for OCHA to engage with other regional bodies such as the newly created Australia-Indonesia Disaster Reduction Facility, the Asian Disaster Prevention Centre (ADPC), and the ISDR Asian Partnership Platform. OCHA has facilitated the meeting of IASC members at the regional level in Bangkok and this has been seen as a helpful forum.

3.1 OCHA in the Asia-Pacific

In the Asia-Pacific region, OCHA has a country presence in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, Indonesia, and the Philippines, with a sub-regional office in the Pacific Island of Fiji and a support cell in Papua New Guinea. The primary role of the regional office in Bangkok, Thailand, with a staff of twenty-five, is to provide support to the areas of the region not covered by these offices.

In 2009, OCHA identified the key priorities for the region as the following:

- **Supporting national governments.** Working closely with relevant inter-agency partners and national bodies (where appropriate) to strengthen preparedness and response capacity in high-priority countries.

- Working directly with member states to promote humanitarian principles and **build partnerships** while recognising existing national response capacities.
- Engaging with **regional bodies**, building on existing regional cooperation and ensuring linkages between regional and global humanitarian response efforts in overall support of national response capacity.
- Engaging with a **longer-term perspective.** Developing sub-regional and country specific action plans with a minimum planning horizon of three to five years to consolidate priorities on preparedness and response.
- Systematically defining the **optimal OCHA “footprint”** in the region, to allow OCHA to build institutional knowledge and long-term cooperation with priority countries and regional bodies. Identifying strategic locations and staffing levels for OCHA’s long-term presence in the region.
- Maintaining a **high degree of flexibility**, enabling OCHA to rapidly scale up its presence in case of a corporate emergency, drawing resources from within the region and at the global level. This will involve recognising and addressing the implications of high turnover of staff on institutional memory and on the effective performance of OCHA.
- Supporting **transition** from life-saving relief to recovery. Given the often-brief response life span of sudden-onset disasters, OCHA needs to quickly elaborate transition strategies that are field driven and context specific.
- Defining **OCHA’s role and added value** in response to those emerging hazards (e.g., pandemics, climate change), to which the response is led by other partners.
- **Refining traditional response tools** to suit the changing environment and capacity of national governments to deal with the humanitarian implications of low to medium intensity disasters and conflicts.
- Developing a corporate advocacy approach vis-à-vis **emerging donors** to both support OCHA’s operations in the region and encourage greater

participation in, and contributions to, bilateral and multilateral tools and instruments.

OCHA notes that it sometimes serves as a buffer between international aid agencies and national capacities that would otherwise be overwhelmed. This in itself can be a useful role. ROAP recognises that moving towards a focus on national capacity-strengthening necessitates a longer-term approach, where building relationships over time is critical.

3.2 Well-positioned or over-extended?

The introduction of the cluster approach to sectoral coordination in late 2005 both cemented OCHA's role in field-level coordination and greatly increased expectations to the point where its capacities in the field have been severely stretched in some places. OCHA's functions straddle HC support, convening, and tracking finances for joint appeals (now not only for CAPs and Fas but additionally for CERF requests and in a growing number of country-level pooled-funding mechanisms); convening inter-cluster fora; as well as securing and managing the flow of information upward to the HC and ERC, downward from HQ and capitals to sub-office levels, and horizontally across sectors.

As compared to other regions, OCHA has a particularly small footprint in a vast area of

considerable diversity which has particular vulnerability to natural disasters as well as continuing conflicts. OCHA currently has 172 national and international staff in the Asia-Pacific region compared to 884 in Africa. The Australia-Indonesia Facility for Disaster Reduction argues that the United Nation's investment as a whole in the region has been low in terms of funds, people, and analytical work.

There is an ongoing debate within OCHA and amongst its donors about the appropriate size for the OCHA presence in the region. Table 1 shows staffing trends in the region between 2001 and 2009.

As of 2010, OCHA's presence in the region could well be described as one in flux. Several country offices are in transition with plans to scale down in 2010 and decisions needing to be taken about whether or not to close them in 2011. These include Nepal, Myanmar, Indonesia, and, at a later date, Sri Lanka. Strategic decisions need to be made about whether or not to maintain sub-regional presences in countries like Indonesia, and to build up sub-regional presences in the context of the Pacific islands. OCHA has embarked on an internal management process to decide where it should deploy and in which countries it should be present—and where and when it should phase down—in a more systematic way. Using the Global Focus Model, a comparative information tool first developed in and for the Asia-Pacific region,

Table 1 OCHA staffing in the Asia-Pacific region, 2001–2009

Country	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
DPRK	3	3	5	4	4	0	0	0	0
India	2	2	4						
Indonesia	39	47	36	28	14	56	10	12	12
Japan	3	4	4	4	3	2	0	0	0
Myanmar	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50
Nepal	0	0	0	0	3	20	18	27	28
Thailand (ROAP)	0	0	0	0	4	13	25	25	25
Fiji	3	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3
Philippines	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
Papua New Guinea		0	0	0	0	2	3	3	3
Sri Lanka	0	0	0	0	0	50	36	52	50
Timor-Leste	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	7	0
	50	59	51	38	30	146	96	130	172

OCHA can do a global vulnerability assessment to shape budget decisions and provide strategic rationale for deployments, HC appointments, and cluster (re)activations. An OCHA policy decision entitled “OCHA’s role in transition” calls for the establishment of specific indicators to define where a country is on a crisis curve and when certain phases should be triggered. While OCHA officers caution that these decisions can’t be solely based on quantitative indicators, the benchmarks will be helpful to inform decisions. Each OCHA country office is now developing its three-year strategy, no matter what its current context. In countries with residual humanitarian needs (which is often the case in post-conflict scenarios) or with cyclical natural disasters, the plan is to reduce the OCHA presence to a Humanitarian Support Unit (HSU) within the RC’s office. The HSUs, used as skeleton coordination teams and springboards for rapid action in the event of new emergencies, stand to be

an important institutional innovation, particularly in the Asia-Pacific.

There is a debate ongoing within OCHA about whether it should rein in program expansion and focus on improving its work within its current portfolio or if it has a responsibility to respond to “crisis level” human needs (as defined by mortality or malnutrition rates for example), even in areas not undergoing an acute emergency. The new analytical approach to determining operational presence levels according to vulnerabilities would seem to point toward an outcome of greater presence rather than less. Even using indicators on how and when to phase down can paradoxically call for greater field presence temporarily. In Nepal, for example, OCHA is planning to scale down beginning in 2010, and yet the Global Focus Model ranks the country as having the worst combination of high risk, vulnerability, and low capacity in the Asia-Pacific region.

4 Regional and field-level coordination and the cluster approach

4.1 Regional and field-level coordination

Coordination in the region is often driven by the national disaster management agency of the country in which the disaster occurs; national militaries often also play a part. In line with this, the OCHA regional office is increasingly looking at how to develop national capacities for response, partly in an attempt to move on from and complement the international system’s own surge capacity. In addition, UNDAC membership now includes some countries in the region and the OCHA regional office is trying to include ASEAN members on UNDAC teams.

OCHA’s coordination role in support of what is often a nationally led response effort highly depends on its ability to rapidly scale up its presence, drawing resources from both regional and global levels. Despite ongoing criticism of OCHA’s surge capacity, its regional office notes that the initial surge capacity

has become less of a problem than the second phase of recruitment and the handover of positions following the initial (six-week) surge.

Delays in staff deployment at times seriously hindered OCHA’s role in field-level coordination. In response to Cyclone Nargis, for example, key appointments took a long time and there was huge turnover in cluster coordinator roles. The Real Time Evaluation, for example, noted more than sixty cluster coordinators over five months in the twelve clusters; OCHA had to run three rounds of training for cluster coordinators to cope with the turnover.⁴ The spate of disasters in the Asia-Pacific in the autumn of 2009, as well as concurrent disasters, such as Cyclone Nargis and the Sichuan earthquake,

4 Robert Turner et al., *Inter-Agency Real Time Evaluation of the Response to Cyclone Nargis* (17 December 2008), 6.

demonstrated the need for OCHA capacity at the regional level to deal with several disasters at once.

In Indonesia, in response to the earthquake in September 2009 in West Sumatra, OCHA deployed quickly, immediately sending most of the Jakarta office staff to Padang, drawing on surge capacity from the regional office, and getting support from an UNDAC team. However, concerns were expressed by respondents over the level of staff turnover in key positions and the slowness of the system in deploying some key people. There were, for example, three different heads of the sub-office in Padang during the period, and a final one is currently being deployed.

There was also a reasonably widespread view, particularly on the part of donors, that OCHA in Padang would have benefited from more senior representation. This shouldn't be seen as a criticism of the strong efforts and hard work of the staff members who were deployed. It was felt that OCHA at times lacked sufficient clout in building its relationship with government and in providing proactive leadership and advocacy around humanitarian issues. The OCHA office did not want to "parachute in" too many international staff, recognizing the critical need for staff to have experience in Indonesia and Bahasa language skills. However, more senior international and national staff might have helped in giving OCHA a stronger voice with the Indonesian government, donors, and international agencies.

In the response to typhoons Ketsana and Parma in the Philippines, OCHA benefited from having a staff members from the Philippines who had previously held a very senior position in the national disaster management authority. Stronger preparedness planning could more systematically identify such high-ranking national figures with an ability to engage authoritatively with government at senior levels.

In response to medium-sized disasters in Nepal, such as the 2008 Koshi floods, OCHA benefited from having a presence in place in Kathmandu and two field offices. It was able to dispatch staff and equipment to the affected area relatively quickly, and could build on existing relationships with local

government and international agencies. It also was able to draw successfully on the regional office in Bangkok for a surge in staff capacity.

In Indonesia, OCHA did recognise the importance of reaching out and coordinating with the government at national, provincial, and district levels. At the Padang level, efforts were made to invite government to coordination meetings and to keep them engaged. In the first two weeks of the response, government officials did participate in general coordination meetings, helped by the fact that the head of the office in Padang was Indonesian and spoke Bahasa. An OCHA official was also one of the few international representatives invited to attend daily government coordination meetings. At the cluster level, there were strong partnerships with government in sectors such as health and education where there were clear counterpart line ministries.

A real concern, however, was that government attendance at the general coordination meetings dropped off after the first two weeks and these started to be held solely in English. It was also difficult for OCHA to adequately engage district-level governments in coordination, given limited capacities and that six districts were affected. The issue of language was a key constraint in enabling government officials and national NGOs to attend and play an active part in both general coordination and cluster meetings. Approaches to tackling this varied between clusters. The shelter cluster had simultaneous translation facilities available in meetings; the education clusters ensured that translation was made in all meetings and just accepted the additional length that this entailed; others switched between Bahasa and English depending on who was attending.

If the international system is serious about following through on its commitments to promoting greater national ownership and leadership in responding to disasters, then having the capacity to hold meetings in local languages is critically important. There is a need for international aid agencies to accept that meetings should be translated and will just have to take longer and to make greater efforts to recruit more senior national staff, international staff

with language skills and translators. OCHA could helpfully invest in surge capacities for professional translators to translate documents and in meetings and simultaneous translation equipment, as part of preparedness and contingency planning.

Language issues were also a real barrier to greater government and local NGO engagement in Myanmar and other recent regional responses. National NGO participation in coordination of the West Sumatra response was limited. To address this, OCHA set up a weekly local NGO coordination meeting. Local NGO consortia interviewed for the study highlighted the need to involve and work with national civil society representatives beyond NGOs, such as local university personnel and community and religious leaders.

OCHA, at the moment, is caught in something of a Catch-22. It recognises the need to move towards greater national ownership and leadership in coordinating and responding to disasters. However when the international aid system comes into town, in response to high profile disasters, OCHA ends up with its hands completely full with the huge influx of hundreds of international aid actors. The system tends to default to what is familiar: coordination largely between international agencies conducted using English as the common language. This excludes national actors and either marginalises them or leads to two responses in parallel with limited understanding between them. This could be seen in the Padang response where international aid, government-led assistance, and national NGO efforts were coordinated in parallel rather than jointly.

4.2 The cluster approach

After initial difficulties with the rollout of humanitarian reform, most aspects (particularly the CERF) have been welcomed in the Asia-Pacific region. Clusters have been largely accepted; in the Philippines a cluster coordination system has even been embedded in national legislation. The cluster rollout, a long and initially painful process, is now

in the final stages, with twenty-one of twenty-seven HC country offices now employing the approach. The expectation is that clusters will be activated in all future sudden-onset crises. The early rollout problems underscored the critical role of OCHA in providing guidance on how the cluster system should operate avoiding the duplication of structures and time consuming processes; identifying gaps in the response, particularly regarding cross-cutting issues; and effectively engaging governmental authorities and civil society as feasible.

The *OCHA Meta-Evaluation* (2009) found that humanitarian actors had high expectations for OCHA not only as a functional coordinator, but also to provide leadership and legitimacy to the process; “to act as an ‘honest broker’ and a mechanism for dispute resolution” among the stakeholders.⁵ That OCHA has achieved this level of credibility among humanitarian actors is significant, given its past interagency struggles to establish its role. The flip side, however, is that virtually all unmet needs and gaps in the coordination framework—for instance the oft-cited deficiencies in monitoring and evaluation—are seen as OCHA’s responsibilities and shortfalls.

In the response to the earthquake in West Sumatra, the cluster system was generally seen by those interviewed in Indonesia as having functioned well: All clusters were activated. Cluster leads hosted meetings and provided a useful focal point for the government across different sectors. Some of those interviewed in Indonesia felt that OCHA’s role in inter-cluster coordination could have been more effective, that clusters weren’t working as effectively together on cross-cutting issues as they could have done, and that OCHA could have done more to provide strategic direction in inter-cluster meetings. The cluster approach in Nepal has been generally very well received by the international agencies involved. It has not been well tested yet, however, given that the rollout only began in the wake of the Koshi floods in 2008.

5 Pierre Robert and Achim Engelhardt, *OCHA Meta-Evaluation: Final Report* (Geneva: OCHA ESS, 21 July 2009), 6.

Across the region, the lack of a clear institutional lead at the global level for protection in natural disasters has posed problems. Protection needs in disasters vary considerably, and can include issues related to displacement (such as forced returns, land and property issues, unequal access to assistance); issues related to underlying conflict or political dynamics (such as ethnic discrimination or risks from landmines); and the needs of specific vulnerable groups such women, children, the elderly, and disabled persons. This wide variation of protections needs and lack of a single lead agency has meant that some important protection needs have fallen through the cracks. OCHA has generally played a role of trying to call attention to these gaps and facilitate leadership by the most appropriate agency.

In Indonesia, the protection cluster posed particular problems. Sub-clusters for child protection (led by UNICEF) and for women, the elderly, and the disabled (led by Oxfam) were activated but there was no overall protection cluster. Among other concerns, this meant that protection issues relating to land and property, and possible discrimination against ethnic minorities, had been neglected as a result. The Humanitarian Response Plan recognised the gap in protection coordination and called for an assessment of outstanding protection needs, but this was not funded and never took place. A lack of understanding of key issues relating to protection in natural disasters continues, particularly due to a lack of operational guidance and a lack of willingness and/or capacity on the part of the protection-mandated UN agencies (UNHCR, OHCHR, and UNICEF) to take on the cluster lead role in protection. This was an issue in the Philippines typhoon response, where no protection cluster was established. There have been even more critical gaps in protection, such as in the Mindanao response in which UNHCR was largely absent.

In Nepal, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) leads the protection cluster. The OHCHR has one of its largest field operations in Nepal, established in 2005, with 170 staff at its height. It has a comprehensive mandate and a stand-alone office that is not integrated into

UNMIN. In its leadership of the cluster, OHCHR benefits from its extensive field presence, and can sometimes provide logistics and operations support, for example during the 2008 floods. However, cluster responsibilities are not part of OHCHR's core mandate and will not be a priority for them unless there is a disaster and/or OCHA pushes them on it. UNHCR is mainly working on refugee issues in Nepal and does not have a major IDP programme. OCHA has encouraged UNHCR to take on IDP issues within the protection cluster, but UNHCR views this as the cluster lead's responsibility. OCHA has been appreciated by both UNHCR and OHCHR for its role in seeking to clarify responsibilities for leadership on IDP issues as they relate to the protection cluster.

In Indonesia in the West Sumatra response, an issue was when and how cluster leads should exit from their coordination role. These decisions were being driven as much by capacity constraints and other issues of timing as by a more objective criterion, namely when cluster lead responsibilities had been adequately fulfilled. This suggests there is a need for more operational guidance around issues of exit and handover. In addition, generating adequate support for recovery processes and OCHA's role within recovery planning and programming continue to be problematic. For instance, in Myanmar there was a disappointing response to the recovery appeal (PONREP) in contrast to the relatively well-funded initial emergency appeal. There is also a need for greater guidance about when and how to exit from cluster coordination approaches and around transitions from OCHA-coordinated emergency assistance to recovery.

Overall there is still a challenge in involving government counterparts in the cluster system. In Nepal, for example, not all cluster leads have fully engaged with government counterparts, despite encouragement by OCHA and the RC/HC. The current plan is that Nepalese government counterparts will co-lead the clusters in 2010 and chair them in 2011. However, considering that Nepalese senior civil servants continually rotate, and that some agencies "are not naturally inclined

to work their way out of a job,” implementation will likely be difficult.⁶

In contexts of transition, such as Nepal, it remains to be seen whether it is feasible to continue with the cluster approach when OCHA no longer has an in-country presence. It is unclear how the burden of continuously organizing meetings and following up with cluster leads can be taken on, other than through the RC’s office. It is unlikely that the joint RC/HC office would have the resources to manage this on a continuous basis. Partly for this reason the plan is to keep the clusters dormant until an emergency requires their use.

4.3 Humanitarian Coordinators

There has been mixed recent experience within the region with attempts to strengthen the leadership role in humanitarian response efforts played by Resident Coordinators (RCs) and Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs). In Myanmar, the acting HC played a crucial role in negotiations with government, highlighting the importance of HC leadership and humanitarian skills. By contrast, the recent response to Typhoon Ketsana in Laos demonstrates how an RC and UN Country Team that were focused on development, with limited understanding of emergency issues, and reluctant to switch gears for an emergency, can lead to a slow response. A Flash Appeal was eventually issued on 23 October, more than three weeks after the typhoon; getting adequate information about

⁶ Interview, RC/HC, December 2009.

the scale of the disaster in its immediate aftermath proved very difficult. As one interviewee noted, a lot of resident coordinators are “still over their head” with little knowledge of the basics of humanitarian action and little understanding of the cluster approach. Another noted a lack of “professional leadership” and argued that OCHA needed to provide greater leadership. It was felt that OCHA should provide consistent inter-cluster coordination and needed to do more to set the pace and the agenda.

OCHA and the IASC in Nepal have benefited from having strong and credible RCs and HCs, who fulfil the requirements of a humanitarian role. In turn (according to the RC/HC), the presence of OCHA in Nepal has contributed to making the HC function more real. As Nepal has transitioned rapidly out of an acute conflict situation in the past two years, however, difficult questions have been raised about the role of the HC and of humanitarian aid more generally. The RC/HC points out that some would argue that a transition context requires an independent HC that is aggressively championing humanitarian issues without thoughts about repercussions. The opposite argument is that, especially when you are in downsizing mode, there is more of a need to bring development actors into the sector, to think about risk and preparedness, and that this is when double-hatting makes most sense. In the latter approach, the same person is accountable to both perspectives, and is uniquely placed to draw the international community towards both sets of issues.

5 Mobilisation of resources for ongoing and sudden-onset crises in the region

Governments in the Asia-Pacific region desire modalities for declaring emergency needs and welcoming international assistance in ways that do not, in their perception, reflect poorly on them or undermine their sovereignty. These political sensitivities speak to a need for innovation in the traditional coordinated processes for mobilizing international aid resources. In recognition, humanitarian financing in the region has seen a shift away from traditional Consolidated Appeal Processes and Flash Appeals (CAPs and FAs) to a greater reliance on the CERF and other pooled-funding mechanisms, as well as bilateral funding patterns unique to the region.

5.1 The CERF and country-level pooled funding

The changes brought about by humanitarian financing reform have been significant and in many ways reflect the type of innovation needed for the Asia-Pacific. With the inception of the new pooled-funding mechanisms—the expanded Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), the country-level Common Humanitarian Funds (CHF), and the smaller Emergency Response Funds (ERFs)—opportunities for diverse forms of financing have expanded considerably over the past four years.

ROAP maintains that the CERF has been important in allowing the harnessing of resources in a low-profile way which avoids the challenge of getting an agreement from the affected state on the need for an international appeal. Such challenges have been experienced in many countries in the Asia-Pacific, including, most recently, in Nepal in the 2009 and 2010 appeals processes. The CERF has been a useful tool to augment national capacities in a discrete fashion (OCHA 2009). Sri Lanka and Myanmar are amongst the top ten recipients of the CERF since

its establishment in 2006. In 2009, the Philippines appeared in the top ten recipients for the first time (due to the internal conflict in the country and natural disasters taking place during the reporting year). Overall, however, the region has only received 19 percent of total CERF funding.

Globally, the CERF has also attracted an unprecedented diversity of donor governments (109 in all have contributed at least once since 2006), as the mechanism facilitates and promotes participation in the humanitarian effort by providing an accountable channel for assistance—even very small amounts—and giving visible credit to participating donors. As such it shows potential for widening the narrow Western-nation core of humanitarian donors and stands to be an important tool for OCHA in engaging with all governments.

Whilst the CERF is proving to be an important mechanism in the Asia-Pacific, some have expressed concern that CERF allocations are becoming the main or sole source of funding for UN agencies in responding to disasters, rather than being used in their intended role: to promote early action (Barber et al. 2008). This was seen as a trend in Indonesia, Laos, and other countries in the region. Some interviewees argued that the CERF risked becoming a “crutch” for UN agencies and was masking failures to mobilise other resources through the appeals process. There was also concern that CERF allocations too often consist of a “division of the cake” between UN agencies without genuine prioritisation of where resources are most needed.

Smaller, OCHA-managed Emergency Response Funds (ERFs) are operational in ten countries globally, but only two are located in the Asia-Pacific (in Myanmar and Indonesia), despite the fact that the region is the locus for the majority of the world’s sudden onset-natural disasters, for which ERFs have

been found to be particularly well-suited as a funding mechanism.⁷ In the case of Indonesia, after the West Sumatra earthquake an initial allocation of \$850,000 was made from the ERF to both national and international NGOs. An additional \$2 million will be provided by SIDA for the continuing West Sumatra response.

Since 2007, OCHA Nepal has sought to implement an ERF and a small amount of funding was made available from Sweden to finally launch it in 2010. Given that OCHA is in transition in Nepal, it may appear to be a strange moment to launch an ERF. However OCHA views it as an important tool in the transition process, allowing it to enhance coordination by facilitating a quick response to disasters, mainly via INGOs that are ineligible for funds from CERF. It will be managed with a residual OCHA presence via the office of the RC/HC.

The ERFs, while not attracting the diversity in donorship of the CERF, have managed to attract donors such as Saudi Arabia and the OPEC fund. Past reviews⁸ have favourably compared OCHA's management of these ERFs to UNDP's administrative role over the Common Humanitarian Funds (CHF) in terms of efficiency, timeliness, and cost-effectiveness (lower overheads). These reviews have recommended duplication in additional countries, although progress on this has been slow. There are no CHFs in the Asia-Pacific at present.

5.2 CAPs, Flash Appeals, and bilateral support

The Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) and Flash Appeals remain the core multilateral tools for humanitarian financing in the Asia-Pacific region. However, as noted above, they have faced some significant challenges. In Nepal, for example, ahead of the 2009 appeal, the Ministry of Finance objected strongly at the last minute to the consolidated appeals process exercise, mainly arguing that humanitarian funding is contradictory to the Paris Principles, according to which funding should be channelled through the recipient government. An understanding

7 Abby Stoddard, *International Humanitarian Financing: Review and Comparative Assessment of Instruments* (July 2008).

8 Robert and Engelhardt, *OCHA Meta-Evaluation*.

was reached at the last minute that allowed the appeal to go forward. Just ahead of the launch of the 2010 appeal, in December 2009, very similar problems resurfaced. As of mid-December, the Ministry of Finance was insisting that only funding for food and refugees be included in the appeal.

The response to Indonesia's West Sumatra earthquake provides another illustration of difficulties for the CAP and Flash Appeals in the Asia-Pacific relief aid context. OCHA coordinated the production of a Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) which is similar to a Flash Appeal but was not called an appeal due to government sensitivities over the term. To date, only about \$15 million (38 percent) of the HRP request (at \$38 million) has been funded, and a large part of this is represented by a \$7 million contribution from the CERF (OCHA FTS).⁹ The low percentage that the appeal has covered to date obscures, however, the generous aid response to the disaster. According to FTS, \$33.1 million was disbursed from over twenty donor governments and other sources and still more was pending ("committed"); all told a funding response of \$70.8 million. Most donor governments, including China and Australia (which contributed the fourth and seventh largest amounts by government donors) channelled their contributions outside the HRP, and only five donor governments contributed to projects listed in the appeal. This supports the notion that although the international donor response is quite healthy, the appeal mechanism may be less relevant due to host governments' general distaste for it and their important bilateral relationships with regional donors. Uncoordinated funding streams spell challenges for operational coordination of assistance on the ground. However, in this case the appeal may also have simply come too late. Many donors made immediate allocations to NGOs and the Red Cross that preceded the launch of the HRP. By the time the HRP was launched, donors were starting to conclude that the scale of the disaster was less than first feared and did not make the second round of allocations

9 Funds reported by FTS were to have been received or committed as of 8 January 2010. It is possible that FTS lags on reporting, as the estimate from OCHA Indonesia was that the HRP was between 40 percent and 50 percent funded.

that might have supported the HRP. Donors themselves noted that they could have done more to coordinate their allocations between themselves and that perhaps a separate donor coordination meeting was needed in the early stages of a response.

In many cases, including in Nepal, the Philippines and in Indonesia, NGOs express the concern regarding the inclusiveness of the appeals process. In Indonesia and Nepal, NGOs were asked to include projects in the appeals for which they had received funding bilaterally. This can make the exercise feel like it is meant mainly to provide the appearance of coherence between various agencies, and to help fund UN agencies. In the Philippines, in response to the typhoons in 2009, the Flash Appeal was seen as timely (out within a week) and was well funded. However, getting it out quickly meant that there were limited opportunities for including NGOs. If non-UN actors are to be better included in flash appeal processes there is a need for stronger engagement between UN and NGO actors in preparedness and contingency planning, if the current one week timetable is to be adhered to. One respondent argued that there was a need for greater inclusiveness beyond UN agencies and the UN country team in the strategic planning feeding into appeals.

While countries in the region have been the recipients of bilateral funding through the CAP mechanism (and outside of it), CAPs, Fas and the CERF generally do not cover disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction activities the type of programming deemed especially important for the natural disaster prone Asia-Pacific region.

In all contexts OCHA is advocating for the affected state and response agencies to expand the reach beyond the traditional humanitarian donors, to include for example the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank. OCHA will seek to work with both traditional donors and regional bodies such as ASEAN and SARC to help governments see the value of maintaining a separate channel for humanitarian aid, including disaster response.

How to move to a more nuanced system for triggering international assistance is a debate that

needs to take place at international, regional and national levels. The political issues go beyond the perceived humiliating terminology of ‘appeal’ to practical concerns of related to the flood of international actors, materials and funds coming into a disaster-affected country, with potentially damaging side effects, over which government bodies may have little to no control. IFRC (2007) calls for governments to screen who responds to a call that assistance is welcome and to link critical legal facilities (such as expedited visas or customs clearance) to a system of registration. Whilst it would clearly be sensitive and inappropriate for OCHA to be involved in registration decisions, it could provide support to the government in developing policies and procedures for a more flexible and politically palatable model for welcoming international assistance. It could also work with donors and international agencies to try and get away from the current ‘feast or famine’ problem in responding to disasters to ensure greater support for neglected emergencies and greater restraint in high profile emergencies. Facilitating a dialogue around this issue between donors and the government would be a helpful first step. At a regional level the CERF has been important in allowing the possibility of bringing in resources in a low profile way getting away from the sovereignty concerns raised by having to appeal.

5.3 Financial reporting and analysis

Much of the global humanitarian resource base would be unknown and un-measurable without OCHA’s Financial Tracking Service (FTS). This system, while having acknowledged weaknesses (particularly in capturing contributions from non-DAC donor governments), has nonetheless been credited with major improvements over the past several years, and provides the single most comprehensive central source humanitarian financing figures available. Having a dedicated FTS staffer in a country office, particularly in the setting where there is a CHF or ERF, who can then track donations in country and can liaise with FTS and headquarters, has been found to significantly enhance the timeliness and accuracy of financial tracking/

OK to replace “non-DAC donor governments” with “donor governments that are not part of DAC--the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD” ??

reporting, and serves also as a support to the RC/HC to inform funding requests and allocation decisions. Better tracking and reporting can in turn support greater transparency in allocation decisions which came up repeatedly as a concern of some of OCHA's humanitarian partner organisations.

One finding of OCHA's meta-evaluation maintained that inconsistent or generally weak reporting of contributions creates a measure of "unpredictability" of financing for humanitarian providers. This would suggest, conversely, that strengthening of OCHA's financial reporting function can enhance predictability and thereby support more strategic and effective humanitarian programming.

In the Asia-Pacific OCHA recognizes the need to adapt its systems for coordinating and tracking funding to better trace regional bilateral support, which, at the moment, too often remains unreported. In Indonesia, for example, a \$50 million bilateral pledge was announced by Saudi Arabia for the Padang response, a pledge greater than the total value of the Humanitarian Response Plan. It was a major possible contribution, but there is little additional information about it to date. The private sector also played an important role in the West Sumatra response and OCHA recognises a need to be able to try and better track private sector contributions although, this will clearly be difficult given the plethora of actors involved.

6 Information management and assessment

As mentioned in Section 3, the OCHA ROAP in Bangkok developed a tool for analysing disaster risk called the Global Focus Model. This was created for the Asia-Pacific region in 2007 and has now been rolled out globally. It analyses hazards, vulnerabilities, and response capacity at the country level using a range of quantitative indicators (OCHA 2009a). It is used in OCHA's own prioritisation, in arguing for presence, in focusing scarce resources on contingency planning and preparedness, and in dialoging with partners. It remains an internal tool, but is shared with key donors and agencies. The ROAP considers the Global Focus Model an important input into strategic planning: The major trends are stable, with only twelve countries from the region in the top ten for disaster risk over the four years the modelling has been done. As an example the high ranking of Laos was a surprise and did help to focus attention on that country.

In terms of information management, OCHA at the regional level has increased investment in data preparedness. It has carried out data readiness assessments in a number of contexts and is putting in place a rigorous process of documenting the

resources and datasets that are available and needed. A data readiness assessment was carried out in Myanmar in February 2008 just prior to Cyclone Nargis, which provided a better understanding of the limits of the data that was available and strengthened the subsequent response. The ROAP is also developing a set of minimum preparedness activities targeted at countries identified as a high priority by the Global Focus Model. Partnerships with actors such as Telecoms sans Frontiers (TSF) and MapAction were seen as effective in the recent Philippines and Indonesia responses. Respondents (largely external to OCHA) felt that there is a need to make information management tools, such as the "Who's doing What Where" (3Ws) tool, more user-friendly. Greater clarity and consistency in the format for Situation Reports is also needed, as is more guidance on the content of situation reports, so that they can move from being a list of activities to being a more useful analytical tool.

There has been less focus on OCHA's role in monitoring responses and a perception that OCHA needs to tread carefully to avoid being seen as playing a policing role. OCHA does have reporting

responsibilities to the Resident Coordinator for agencies receiving CERF funding and does have clear monitoring responsibilities for agencies receiving in-country emergency response funds such as in Indonesia. In the West Sumatra response, OCHA is attempting to play a role in monitoring and is putting together a monitoring matrix tracking the status of indicators used in the Humanitarian Response Plan. Attempts at the cluster level to undertake joint monitoring have been problematic, with some agencies feeling that they were giving up scarce human resources to take part in joint monitoring exercises without getting back much in the way of results.

There was an initial lack of clarity around the responsibilities of cluster lead agencies for information management. Since November 2007 guidance on this has been finalised and sets out clearly the responsibilities of cluster leads and OCHA. The guidance states clearly that the lead agency for information management in each sector is the cluster lead and should provide resources, people, tools, and equipment. However, it is taking a long time for this guidance to filter from headquarters of the cluster lead to agencies and into the field. Cluster leaders are still too often unfamiliar with their information management responsibilities and don't have adequate resources or tools to call upon. IFRC is by far the furthest ahead, with a cadre of trained information management personnel—the strength of this could be seen in the Indonesia response.

In Indonesia, OCHA was generally seen to have done a reasonable job of information management in the 2009 West Sumatra response. OCHA situation reports were timely, useful and widely read. Who, what, where matrices, contact lists, and maps were developed and disseminated. Baseline data such as demographic and place name information was made available to the clusters at an early stage. OCHA Indonesia sees itself as having a role in public information and raising awareness about disaster risk reduction (OCHA 2009f). Given this, OCHA could perhaps usefully look at whether or not it should have a role in providing or supporting the provision of information to disaster-affected populations following disasters. Communication with

disaster-affected populations about aid efforts and entitlements seems to have been a relatively neglected aspect of the disaster response and one where more efforts could usefully be focused at both cluster and inter-cluster levels. As a local NGO consortium argued at the end of October:

Up until this time there has been no clarification or notification to the general public (community) about how many organizations have come to West Sumatra to help with this disaster's management, where they have come from, and what they have done. The only announcements that are made come from the Governor's compound and are only available if (1) we request information to UN OCHA, (2) if we join cluster meetings. It would be more appropriate if who was doing what was clearly made public by being announced through the media (IDEP Foundation 2009).

Information management and analysis is a definite strength of the OCHA Nepal office, and an area from which other OCHA offices could learn. The main information products consist of:

- the Nepal Information Platform (NIP), a comprehensive website;
- Who's doing What Where (3Ws tool) and contact lists;
- situation overviews, produced monthly and covering political and security developments, operational space issues, and humanitarian response by sector;
- reports and maps on operational space violations and *bandhs* (political strikes)/bandits;
- reports and maps of security incidents, working with UNDSS and drawing on a joint database; and
- food security monitoring unit, one of the largest such projects, managed by WFP until 2008, with input from OCHA.

These products have covered both the political and development spheres, as well as more narrowly defined humanitarian needs. They also include analysis, rather than simply information, and they are produced consistently in terms of timing and format. In particular, OCHA has been able to track trends over time in security incidents and operational

the Association
of INGOs:
indigenous or
international?

space violations, by maintaining ongoing databases. The Association of INGOs credits OCHA with creating a more analytical and strategic approach to the situation in Nepal, in part because of their information products. A broad range of actors rely on them for important background information.

Experience within the region with more successfully coordinated assessments has been mixed. In the West Sumatra response in Indonesia the assessment process was a major weakness and attempts by OCHA and other agencies to undertake joint rapid needs assessments were problematic. Prior to the emergency an inter-agency common assessment tool had been endorsed by the cluster lead agencies based on the rapid assessment tool prepared by the Emergency Capacity Building (ECB) Project. Mercy Corps, working with the ECB consortium partners, other agencies, and UNOCHA, took the lead in implementing a joint needs assessment and compiling the data. The process resulted in a compiled data set covering four districts and more than thirty sub-districts, which was shared with OCHA and other stakeholders within one week of the earthquake.

This stands in contrast to the West Java earthquake, less than a month earlier, after which ECB agencies used the JNA for their assessment but the data was never compiled. However, there were many issues of dissatisfaction with the process itself and with the results: The assessment form used was widely seen as too long at ten pages and hence too cumbersome to be effective for rapid needs assessment. At the time, no specific methodology for carrying out the JNA had been completed by the ECB and, in particular, there was no guidance on sampling methods. All agencies were requested to use the form when carrying out assessments but the lack of clarity over sampling meant that the coverage and representativeness of the assessment results were unclear. Lack of electricity in the week after the earthquake meant that printing or photocopying the assessment form was a challenge. The UNDAC team did not seem to have played any role in the rapid assessment process as it was largely focused on coordinating the search and rescue teams. Given the failings of the initial rapid assessment process, there was a marked lack of

more detailed follow-up assessments at the cluster level. The World Bank/UNDP-led post-disaster needs assessment did take place.

In other recent disaster responses in the region there have been more positive experiences with joint assessments. In the response to Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar, a joint needs assessment (PONJA) was seen as very important in relationship and confidence building, enabling everyone around the table to come to a common agreement about needs. In the Philippines, the UNDAC team conducted a sequence of rapid joint needs assessments which informed the appeal process. More detailed sector-level assessments have been largely absent in other recent regional responses, as was the case in the Philippines—the ROAP noted that there is still a lack of methodologies and capacities on the part of the clusters to conduct these. There is still an issue with donor government and agency headquarters demands for too much assessment information too early in the disaster. The regional office hopes that the ACE process (an international project to develop assessment coordination) might help in terms of delineating clearer phases in assessment and information gathering. There is a need to focus on the skills of people carrying out assessments as well as the tools and formats for assessments. Too often personnel with basic assessment skills, such as survey design and sampling, are lacking.

In Nepal, partly at the encouragement of donors, OCHA led a large needs analysis framework (NAF) process ahead of the 2009 appeal. This consisted mainly of pooling together existing sources of information and analysis. It is not clear that the NAF gave donors more faith in the appeal document. However, several donors felt that the NAF was too broad, included a too-wide range of issues, and lacked clear prioritization, which diluted the message. The RC/HC and OCHA, besides being in a difficult position to prioritise, would also argue that certain types of needs—mainly disaster preparedness—will inherently always be “priority two,” and yet they are arguably as important as immediate responses such as food aid, and likely more effective per dollar spent in the long term. Both OCHA and donors would like to see more evidence-based planning and reporting,

but find it difficult to know how to move forward. It is a complex task in straightforward emergency settings, and even more difficult in a transition context where very different kinds of needs are competing with one another. This is perhaps an area where outside support would be valuable.

In addition to the needs analysis framework, OCHA in Nepal has led a consultative process to develop a multi-sector analysis tool, the Multi-cluster Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA), based on global models. The goal is to provide rapid information about acute humanitarian needs following an emergency in order to make decisions about where to direct limited resources, while limiting the number of “over-assessed victims.” MIRA was initially developed

by the IASC in April 2008, and adapted or used in a limited way following the Koshi floods and other flooding in the Far Western Region in August and September 2008. The process of developing MIRA and a common approach to rapid assessment in general has been broadly consultative; IASC members spoken with were generally positive about the tool. It has not yet been widely tested, however. The most prevalent source of rapid information after an emergency has tended to be the Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS), which uses its own shorter assessment tool, utilised by a very large network of volunteers. A consensus has been reached that the NRCS will use its own tool within the first seven days, and the MIRA tool after this, but it remains to be seen how well this division will work in practice.

7. Humanitarian advocacy and civil-military coordination

7.1 Humanitarian advocacy and principles

Some respondents felt that there was a lack of clarity about OCHA's role in relation to humanitarian advocacy in the region. It was noted that the OCHA regional office did give strong guidance and direction to international humanitarian agencies to engage with governments, and that it has been a strong advocate for the IFRC's International Disaster Response Law (IDRL) process.

According to people interviewed, there is a tendency both within the region and internationally to neglect conflict-related problems within the Asia-Pacific. This may be partially explained by the fact that development actors typically ignore conflicts (that is to say, unlike humanitarian actors, they tend to do their work *in spite of* as opposed to *because of* occurring conflicts). OCHA therefore has an advocacy role in continuing to draw attention to neglected conflicts. When it entered Nepal in 2005, OCHA raised the alarm about the implications of the conflict for development partners and helped to mobilise resources for UN agencies and NGOs

responding to the growing humanitarian needs. For example, some development agencies assumed that health and education activities were still rolling out smoothly, whereas in fact many posts lacked supplies or staff and population movements were being controlled. OCHA Nepal also supported the rollout of the Basic Operating Guidelines (BOGs), a set of principles designed to further humanitarian access, and in 2006 led trainings for the UN and NGOs on OCHA's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

OCHA has worked within the region with governments to develop and set standards for disaster management, including support to new disaster management legislation and for initiatives such as the IDRL principles (International Disaster Response Laws, Rules, and Principles). The OCHA regional office sees itself as having a continuing role in protecting standards and principles in dialogue with governments and regional entities.

In Indonesia, some of those interviewed felt that OCHA could have played a more active advocacy

role in the West Sumatra response if it had had stronger leadership and more senior staff deployed to Padang. Some agencies felt that OCHA largely failed to be constructively critical of government gaps in its own response, such as in the delivery of food assistance or in covering cash allowances. Others felt that OCHA could have done more to lobby and engage donors for support to the Humanitarian Response Plan. In general, OCHA's role was seen as relatively "passive"; some of those interviewed talked about how difficult it was to "fire up" OCHA to advocate to remedy gaps in the response.

In Nepal, OCHA's advocacy role on humanitarian needs and principles, specifically on highlighting the importance of disaster preparedness, is widely appreciated. There are a few issues on which it could consider becoming more involved, especially on government restrictions on NGOs and on responses to food insecurity. The government has repeatedly questioned the value of international NGOs (as well as the UN, to a lesser extent), raising concerns about their perceived lack of transparency and/or Western or religious agenda, and questioning their reliance on international staff. The Ministry of Social Welfare has imposed restrictions on visas and budgets, and made it difficult to obtain the necessary registrations and audits. While NGOs have not specifically asked for OCHA's help in meeting these challenges, this could be one area in which it could be more active in liaising with the MOHA and other relevant ministries.

In Nepal, OCHA could also take a more active role in promoting a dialogue on alternative responses to food insecurity, other than food aid. FAO and others, for example, have asked OCHA to proactively assist clusters seeking funding, rather than food, from the appeal. Several international NGOs have also called attention to the need for wider approaches. It is widely acknowledged that the current (and growing) reliance on food aid is unsustainable and does little to tackle underlying problems. Some efforts are currently underway to diversify approaches, mainly from the EU Food Facility, the US government and FAO. OCHA's leverage with the donors may be limited, however. In both 2008 and 2009, one

donor opted at the end of the financial year to give large sums to WFP, rather than to give more broadly across other sectors within the appeal, in part due to the donor's internal requirements that the money be spent quickly, lest it be returned to the central treasury. Situations like this illustrate that the needs analyses and appeal documents compiled by OCHA are only one factor among many influencing donor decision-making.

More generally, OCHA is perhaps in a difficult position in terms of advocacy in Nepal. First, given that if it were to raise its voice strongly to highlight the growing food insecurity situation, it might prompt the question of why is it then withdrawing. Second, it may seem to contradict its humanitarian role if it were to get involved in facilitating and promoting longer-term approaches such as infrastructure development, social safety nets, natural resource planning, etc. Highlighting this dilemma, the consolidated appeals, themselves coordinated and promoted by OCHA, have increasingly become disproportionately heavy on food aid.

7.2 Civil-military coordination

National military actors are increasingly engaged in humanitarian activities in the Asia-Pacific region; in many countries militaries are given the mandate to act as first responders. In India, for instance, the Disaster Management Act provides for the establishment of a National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) consisting of eight battalions stationed around the country. NDRF troops are trained in disaster response, and the eight battalions are integrated with state disaster response mechanisms. The NDRF was active in the response to floods in Bihar in 2008 (Price and Bhatt 2009, Harvey 2009).

However, existing guidelines on the use of military assets in disaster response, such as the UN Military and Civil Defence Asset (MCDA) Register and the Oslo Guidelines, focus largely on the deployment of international forces to complex emergencies (UN 2003, 2006). Noticeably absent from these guidelines is any consideration of how humanitarian actors should relate to the military forces of affected states

when they become engaged in humanitarian action. As it is, some states, including India, have rejected the Oslo Guidelines because they were not developed inter-governmentally and are seen as impinging on their sovereignty. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)'s reference paper *Civil-Military Relationship in Complex Emergencies* covers national militaries, as do guidelines produced by the ICRC on the use of armed protection for humanitarian assistance (IASC 2004, ICRC 1995). However, these focus on how humanitarian actors relate to militaries, rather than the role of militaries as providers of assistance.

The Padang response was generally felt to have coordinated the civilian and military elements (which included support from the US and Australian militaries), with the military actors taking part in the appropriate cluster meetings without any major issues arising. The Indonesian military (TNI) continues to have an important role in the government's own response to disasters. At the Padang level this seems to have been effectively coordinated through the governor's office. It was felt that OCHA in its preparedness and contingency planning work could do more to engage with the Indonesian military on its role in disaster management.

Civil-military coordination was strong and important in the Philippines response with, most of the national disaster management authority composed of ex-military officials. More generally, the regional office noted that there was a need for stronger

engagement with military actors throughout the region around their roles in disaster management and that there was much to do in terms of preparedness. OCHA and the UN more generally are not well enough resourced to do this effectively. There is a need to develop greater interoperability between regional military forces and to build upon good experiences with joint exercises. The region also provides a large proportion of UN peacekeeping forces; there is a need to work with troop-contributing countries on standards.

In Nepal, some efforts at military cooperation on disaster response between Nepal and other nations and entities such as the US Pacific Command Multinational Planning Augmentation Team (MPAT) are already taking place, mainly on earthquake and flood response. Efforts by OCHA to work with the military on disaster response are complicated, however, by the fact that there are still two standing armies in the country; the Maoists are not yet integrated and the regular army has yet to undergo democratic reforms. An OCHA staff member from ROAP working on civil-military issues visited Nepal recently, but found that it was too early to work more closely with the military on disaster response. OCHA Nepal, with support from Geneva, has encouraged implementation of a customs model agreement in Nepal. It has conducted trainings with customs agents at various border crossings and airports, with the goal of facilitating the rapid entry of emergency response equipment and search and rescue animals.

8. Preparedness and transition

8.1 Preparedness

The OCHA regional office has been closely involved in supporting stronger preparedness and contingency planning at national levels. Using the disaster management skills of UNDAC assessment personnel, preparedness assessments have been undertaken in five countries in close dialogue with governments. Efforts are also being made to link disaster management more centrally into the development frameworks of both governments and the UN through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) process. In addition, UN Country Teams and Resident Coordinators are being more strictly appraised, bringing greater accountability for the quality of preparedness. The Global Focus Model is being used to ensure that high-priority countries have strong contingency plans in place that are regularly updated. Respondents perceived that there is a perception that UN Country Teams are starting to have greater in-country ownership of plans and better inclusiveness of NGO partners. As ever, there is a danger that contingency planning can become a formulaic exercise that produces plans which stay on the shelf when disasters actually hit; there is still a need to invest further in improving the quality of the contingency planning process.

The response to Typhoon Ketsana in Vietnam demonstrated some of the benefits of good preparedness. Just before the typhoon, OCHA had been involved in training in cluster management and provided support in recent years to strengthening government capacity for disaster management. Following the typhoon the government and UN Country Team were able to coordinate the response themselves with little outside support.

By contrast, the response to Typhoon Ketsana in Laos was very slow; limited information was available

from either the government or from the UN Country Team. A key constraint for the OCHA regional office was the lack of proactive information from the Resident Coordinator's office and the UN Country Team. There were similar problems in Cambodia where a development-focused UN Country Team had trouble changing gears to deal with an emergency. Ultimately, the solution is better-prepared and emergency-focused UN Country Teams in which disaster management has been embedded into development planning. In the interim, however, better tools are needed to engage in countries having a development focus and which are ill-equipped to deal with disasters.

In Indonesia OCHA is engaged in various preparedness activities. It meets regularly with the Indonesia disaster management authority (BNBP) to work together on preparedness initiatives and advise on various regulations resulting from the 2007 disaster management law. In 2008 and 2009, OCHA coordinated the preparation of an inter-agency contingency plan for Indonesia and is involved in various ongoing disaster risk reduction activities. Since 2005, OCHA has also supported BNBP to conduct provincial and district-level contingency planning exercises (OCHA Indonesia 2009).

The contingency planning process may have helped in the relatively smooth rollout of the cluster approach and development of the Humanitarian Response Plan. However, few of those interviewed felt that the contingency plan had informed and strengthened the response at the Padang (provincial) level. There is clearly still an issue with the effectiveness and usefulness of the contingency planning process and the need to overcome the tendency for plans to remain "on the shelf." There was widespread support from those interviewed for OCHA to continue playing a role in preparedness

I don't see "OCHA Indonesia 2009" in the list of sources.

and contingency planning in Indonesia and these issues were seen as a strong justification for OCHA's continuing presence in the country. OCHA, it was felt, brought distinctive skills to the preparedness process and wider disaster risk reduction and disaster management debate in Indonesia that could not necessarily be picked up by other agencies. OCHA was seen as having developed strong relationships and a constructively supportive role with BNPB at the national level, a role that was useful as BNPB continues with its own organisational development and rollout from the national to provincial and district levels.

OCHA in Nepal has increasingly focused on disaster preparedness. In 2009, the head of office estimated that it constituted 25 percent of OCHA's work in country. OCHA has worked with the government to develop a national Disaster Risk Management policy, which was passed by the cabinet in 2009, although not yet enacted in parliament. It has led a number of preparedness and contingency planning exercises and workshops including twenty-four annual disaster preparedness workshops with government and various partners at the district level (ideally conducted ahead of the monsoon season, although only beginning in 2009 were they held on time). Contingency planning exercises were carried out by the IASC country team via the clusters, down to district level, and an earthquake simulation exercise was held in 2009.

As regards the low funding so far received for coordinated disaster preparedness, OCHA may seek to expand its reach beyond traditional humanitarian donors to include, for example, the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank. China and India are major bilateral donors to some countries in the region, such as Nepal, but it is not clear whether or how they would be willing to support multilateral disaster preparedness efforts. OCHA will seek to work with both traditional donors and regional bodies such as ASEAN and SAARC to help the government of Nepal see the value of maintaining a separate channel for humanitarian aid, including disaster response.

8.2 Transition

Transition refers to a country's shift out of an acute crisis condition or conflict and toward a more stable, less severe, level accompanied by a recovery and development programming orientation. For humanitarian coordination in the Asia-Pacific and other regions, transition has raised questions about the appropriate time and manner of OCHA's phase down or hand over of responsibilities.

In some countries, such as Nepal, there are concerns about whether cluster coordination can continue without OCHA to do the continuous work of organizing meetings and mediating between cluster leads, etc. As mentioned above, it is unlikely that the joint RC/HC office would have the resources to manage this on a continuous basis; partly for this reason the plan is to keep the clusters dormant until an emergency requires their use. OCHA is preparing to exit Nepal within the next two years, and several senior staff will end their contracts as soon as June 2010. The plan is that the office of the RC/HC will take over many of OCHA's key roles. Some external support will continue to be provided from OCHA headquarters (for example on the ERF and, possibly, clusters), and from the regional office (for example with surge capacity and on disaster preparedness). The joint RC/HC office will take on the core information-management tasks, with an increased focus on peace building and development coordination, and will re-hat some OCHA field offices. Donors, while generally eager to exit, have so far been supportive of a more measured and careful transition, to scale down UNMIN as well as OCHA.

The long-term goal is to hand over these responsibilities to the Nepalese government, but it is likely to be the RC who manages this with UNDP in the future, rather than OCHA doing so directly. UNDP has signalled that it will need additional staff and funding to take on these roles; the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) at headquarters can field people for an initial assessment or plan in a post-crisis situation, but there is a need for a more continuous presence. Generally,

the RC/HC feels that, with the presence of OCHA, the UN (and particularly UNDP) has lost some of its disaster response capacity, like a muscle that has not been used. It will require some effort to get to the point where risk is routinely considered to be a part of the UN's Development Assistance Framework, for example, as it is in other disaster-prone countries like Bangladesh.

In this period of transition, OCHA has struggled to find a balance in how it portrays the overall situation in Nepal. On the one hand, the issues that triggered OCHA's arrival are no longer present. These were the conflict, displacement, and instability that required a presence to be watching and reporting back. And the overall humanitarian presence is decreasing, as seen in the departure of several key NGOs. On the other hand, there are multiple reasons for having OCHA and a humanitarian appeal, some of which are new and others which the UN was perhaps not as familiar with before: the major food security problem, climate change, high rates of death from diarrhoea and other causes of infant mortality, chronic disasters including the threat of a major earthquake, and the prospect of more instability. According to OCHA's Global Focus Model, Nepal ranks as the country with the worst combination of high risk and vulnerability, and low

capacity in the Asia-Pacific region, and fourteenth worst worldwide. And yet many of these indicators are probably not worse than they were five years ago.

Similar transition questions are likely to be faced in Sri Lanka. In Indonesia, as noted in the section on clusters, there were uncertainties about the process of the exit of cluster leaders and the handover of their coordination responsibilities in the West Sumatra response. Countries like Indonesia, the Philippines, and Bangladesh, where natural disasters are frequent and recurrent, raise different challenges about how and whether it makes sense to think about transition. The frequency of natural disasters means that there is a strong argument for a permanent OCHA presence and/or innovative ways of maintaining a footprint, such as keeping Humanitarian Support Units within the RC's Office. The long-term goals clearly are that nations are able to respond to their own disasters and that development partners have successfully mainstreamed disaster management into their development planning. The question for OCHA and its donors is: What is needed when development actors haven't mainstreamed disaster management and states still lack capacity?

Conclusions

Humanitarian coordination in the Asia-Pacific region faces significant challenges as well as opportunities. The size and capacities of OCHA in the region in many ways do not measure up to the challenges posed by the frequency and scale of natural disasters as well as continuing conflicts in some areas. At the same time, governments in the region are increasingly interested and able to play a broader role in natural-disaster preparedness and response. While the expanded role of national actors creates sizeable opportunities, it also requires OCHA and other international humanitarian agencies to increase efforts to build national capacities—an area which has not been a strength or focus in the past.

Reflecting these tensions, during relatively high-profile emergencies such as the earthquake in West Sumatra in Indonesia and Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar, OCHA has at times struggled with how to manage its dual roles of coordinating what can be a blizzard of international agencies and simultaneously supporting a government-led response. Field-level coordination of response has sometimes been hindered by delays in staff deployment within OCHA as well as a lack of clarity in establishing an institutional lead on protection in natural disasters. On the whole, however, OCHA's coordination role in both conflict and disaster settings is highly valued by a range of actors in the region.

Recent efforts to strengthen the leadership roles of Resident Coordinators and Humanitarian Coordinators have produced mixed results. Experiences in Myanmar, Nepal, and Laos (for example) have demonstrated the utility of having an RC who is able to bring humanitarian skills to bear, regardless of whether he or she wears the HC hat. In Asia-Pacific, OCHA and the HC can be important voices drawing attention to the humanitarian impacts of conflict where other more development-oriented actors may be hesitant to do so.

As it has globally, OCHA has increased its role in convening and tracking funding for joint appeals in Asia-Pacific. Governments in this region have shown a desire for modalities to solicit funds that do not appear to reflect poorly on their capacities or undermine their sovereignty, as the traditional CAPs and FAs are seen to do. An increasing reliance by UN agencies on the CERF may be one way to address this, but other innovations are likely needed, including, perhaps, broader engagement with regional bodies and emerging donors.

OCHA has made great strides in managing humanitarian information in the region, most notably in developing the Regional Focus Model and various country-level attempts to lead on joint needs assessments as well as preparedness assessments. Disaster preparedness in general has been a particular area of increased focus for OCHA as well as Resident Coordinators and Humanitarian Coordinators. Given the important role of national military actors in disaster response, there is widely felt to be a need for increased engagement with such actors at both the national and regional levels. At the same time, questions remain about OCHA's ability to adequately support disaster preparedness work at the scale required, especially in contexts where it does not have or intends to phase down its country presence, such as Bangladesh, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Nepal.

The growing strength, capacity, assertiveness, and sensitivities over sovereignty of many countries in

the Asia and Pacific region mean that OCHA needs to continue to adapt and refine how it supports humanitarian coordination in the region and how it engages with governments. A stronger and more constructive engagement that supports and extends national capacities to assist and protect their own citizens in times of disaster is the key strategic task facing OCHA and its humanitarian partners in the region.

OCHA and international humanitarian actors will continue to be needed in the region in spite of—indeed, in order to support and complement—governments' growing capacities in disaster management. The region's vulnerability to natural disasters, the continuing humanitarian consequences of conflicts, and emerging vulnerabilities relating to climate change all suggest that the UN and its humanitarian partners need to maintain a capacity to respond in the region. Policies, legislation, and rhetorical commitments to investing more in disaster management and embedding it in development thinking require support to be effectively put into practice. The region's growing economic and political importance means that international humanitarian actors need to engage with key governments and actors in the region around international and regional humanitarian policy debates and as potential donors.

OCHA has done an impressive job in setting out clear priorities that reflect the particular challenges of the region. It is moving in the right direction in terms of investing in preparedness and contingency planning and focusing on engagement with national disaster management authorities. However, the ability of OCHA to deliver against these priorities is questionable given its own relatively light footprint in the region, budget constraints, and a widespread under-investment by the United Nations in the region in terms of funds, people, and analytical work focused on disaster management. It is hoped that this report will help contribute to a reflection on the modes and means of continued donor support to humanitarian coordination in the region.

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