

## Emergency Capacity Building Project Internal Learning Event Minutes

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### Participant list:

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## Expectations for the day

- to discuss the challenges faced by the consortia
- to learn more about the history of the Project
- to hear different perspectives about the Project
- to understand the challenges and successes at the agency level
- to hear about the progress made by the Project
- to hear more from the consortia and their future plans
- to think about the future and how the consortia can continue
- to think about the next steps to continue to build capacity
- to look at how to address the challenges that were faced
- to celebrate the Project's successes and appreciate and acknowledge the hard work
- to hear from the global level about their view of the Project
- to think about how to share the challenges, lessons and achievements of the Project

## ECB Phase II – what did we set out to do?

[Phase 1](#) of the ECB Project (2005-2008) focused on [research findings](#) and the development of field tools and [practical guides](#). In contrast, [Phase 2](#) was a five year project arranged around three cross cutting themes – [Accountability and Impact Measurement](#), national [Staff Capacity](#) development and [Disaster Risk Reduction](#). Four consortia countries were chosen along with one regional consortium in the Horn of Africa. The Project was also restructured and focal points were introduced in each of the [six agencies](#). Initiatives were designed to build capacity at the field, agency and sector level.

### *Key reflections:*

- A number of important tools and resources were produced in Phase 1; Phase 2 was designed to field test and disseminate these tools. There were also a number of incomplete initiatives following the first phase and a second phase provided an opportunity to complete these programs. Phase 2 also sought to embed capacity building into the way the six agencies worked.
- Phase 2 was a competitive process and field consortia had to submit proposals in order to participate. This was to ensure that the consortia put thought into their applications, which improved ownership.
- The second phase provided a space for the agencies to collaborate and cooperate comfortably; to find out what would and wouldn't work, so that lessons could be learnt and shared. This was because of the Project's structure and the support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The ECB Project provided agencies with a safe forum to discuss shared concerns. While this was not an expectation of the Project, it became a lasting and important feature.
- In addition, the tools and resources created are useful and popular. This stems from how the Project was designed, with clear goals, and because the project had buy in from all of the agencies.

- The fact that the agencies in the consortia would like to continue to work together in the future demonstrates the Project's impact at the field level. The energy and enthusiasm at the field level has been impressive, they have shown persistence and achieved incredible outcomes.

### Tools and resources:

The process of tool creation has varied, in some instances it was very collaborative with all the agencies involved, and at other times it was led by a single agency only. For example, the creation of [Toward Resilience](#) was a very collaborative process, as was the development of the [Good Enough Guide](#). In contrast, the [EFSL 48 hour assessment tool](#) was developed by Oxfam.

Key reflections:

- [Building Trust in Diverse Teams](#), [Toward Resilience](#) and the [Good Enough Guide](#) are in use in the sector. They are valuable resources and have a very good reputation.
- OFDA provided support for a process evaluation of the development of the [Toward Resilience Guide](#) to look at the challenges of collaborative tool development.
- The sector as a whole needs to modernise. The amount of information available is too much to be put into practice in the field.

### *Why was the Gates Foundation interested in funding the ECB Project?*

Gates was interested in funding the Project because they believed a lot more could be accomplished if agencies worked together, especially at the field level. Gates also wanted humanitarian agencies to change the way they do business, to make it a more efficient and collaborative environment.

It's interesting to look at the change in approach since the Project started in 2005. There have been great advances in gap coverage and coordination. It's also interesting to analyse if the ECB Project has helped and supported this process, e.g. the [Inter-Agency Standing Committee](#) (IASC) Task Force on Accountability to Affected Populations recently developed an [Operational Framework](#) to ensure accountability of all international actors to affected populations. The work of the IASC, and the basis of the Operational Framework, comes from work undertaken by ECB to develop the [Key Elements of Accountability](#). We shouldn't underestimate the influence the Project has had.



## Analysis of the timeline

- The [consortia](#) were selected in August 2008 (not represented on the timeline)

### 2009

- Staff turnover has been an issue throughout the Project. For example, in Indonesia in 2009 the consortium applied to be part of the Project but soon afterwards most of the Country Directors left their positions. When the new Country Directors inherited the Project there was a diminished sense of ownership, but now the Country Directors want to continue to work together, although nothing has been agreed formally. In Bolivia there is a new group of Country Directors and coordinators too, except for Roger Quiroga. They are also moving forward and have signed an agreement to continue working together post-ECB which shows the sustainability of the initiative.

### 2010

- The financial crisis in 2010 restricted the capacity of the Project team. The Project team lost two core staff members and the agencies faced greater difficulties in securing resources. The planned initiatives had to be re-prioritised and the crisis had a significant impact on the organisation of the Project. However, this created greater ownership and devolved more responsibility to the advisors and agency managers.
- The Haiti response in 2010 revealed that the design of the Project at the headquarter level was absent and as a result coordination did not occur, even though it was happening at the field level. For example, there were no simulations at the headquarters level and as a result the emergency teams in Haiti did not know each other.
- In Indonesia the [JNA was used for the first time](#), which was an important step proving that the consortium agencies could work together.
- In 2010 it was necessary to find more match funding to meet the Gates grant, which proved to be a problem. There were a lot of good intentions at the beginning of the Project but it was hard to gain fundraising momentum and this was a challenge throughout because of the way the Project was set up (this refers to both the financial structure of the Project and the limited funds that the Project began with). The funding crisis overshadowed the Project and its successes, even in 2013 when it impacted the Principals' decision to close the Project. Meetings often focused on funding and not on the field and their achievements. **A key lesson from this experience is the importance of arranging and organising funding and the structure of a Project before it begins.**
- **In addition, coordination is an important part of any activity, but it is often the first thing that gets removed if there is insufficient funding. However, it should always be considered.**

## 2011

- In 2011 the first joint response in Bolivia took place along with the pilot of the ENHance program. The [Disaster Response Engagement Protocols \(DREP\)](#), collaborative protocols developed to govern responses, were finalized in Indonesia. In Bangladesh, a similar set of ECB protocols were developed too. The HoA developed a partnership with the Assessment Capacities Projects (ACAPS).
- In 2011 the Director of the Project left creating a six month gap which proved difficult for the Project team. A mid-term evaluation took place which was a good exercise but generated mixed reactions. The final report was over 100 pages and while some points were valid there wasn't agreement on all of the findings.
- There was a mega-landslide in La Paz, Bolivia, in early 2011 and the consortium acted together to advocate at the local and national level, creating confidence within the consortium (internally and externally.)
- The [Consortium Self Assessment Survey](#) (CSAS) and the Agency Self Assessment Survey (ASAS) were implemented to measure the Project's strengths and weaknesses, feeding into annual planning at the global and field level. Over time this became disjointed because of timing cycles and as a result the CSAS and ASAS became tick box exercises. This was frustrating and didn't capitalise on the opportunity they presented.
- Oxfam led an initiative with the WASH cluster to improve accountability and based on this experience the consortium raised money to carry out a similar initiative with the Shelter cluster. It involved [various deployments](#) which were linked to the IASC Accountability to Affected Populations initiative.
- [Shelter training modules](#) were developed by CARE and piloted in Indonesia. As a result of the pilot the participants decided to hold regular meetings to learn and share information about shelter. It was an opportunity to share technical issues and approaches and was not intended to replace the Shelter cluster. They received support from other agencies and attracted other members. In this way the Indonesian consortium was seen as a key stakeholder in the country.
- The Project received ECHO grant funding which provided money for additional staff to support the field facilitators in an attempt to adjust to the gaps that were created by the financial crisis in 2010. The ECHO grant allowed the ECB team to hold ECBinter-active events in all five consortia, and provided an opportunity to share lessons which helped to address Objective 3 of the Gates grant.

## 2012

- In Bolivia, the [ECBinter-active events](#) were a chance to share the consortium's work and as a result they developed a relationship with the Bolivian Government. They started to work through the Humanitarian Country Team (HTC) at the same level as the UN, and the Government saw the consortium agencies as having one voice. The consortium grew at this stage to comprise of the ECB agencies and the Consortium of British Humanitarian

Agencies (CBHA) (10 in total) renamed the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies in Bolivia (CAHB), and together they made the most of their collective experience by acting with one voice. The government quickly recognized the value of their work and started to call them by one name, as a consortium, rather than the individual agencies involved. The same process occurred in Indonesia where UNOCHA and other humanitarian actors started to view the agencies as 'ECB.'

- In the HoA this process never materialized although it was expected to. It was suggested that the regional nature of the consortium prevented this cohesion but the Horn of Africa Field Facilitator noted that even if it was just a consortium in Kenya (rather than the region) it would have been difficult to achieve due to different circumstances in the countries involved.
- ECBinter-active was the first time the consortia could share with each other and it had a real impact. It was also an opportunity for agencies and Principals to see and hear about the Project's accomplishments, which increased support from the global level.
- In April 2012 at an IWG meeting the Principals decided to go forward with ECB Phase 3, focusing on urban and resilience issues.
- In September 2012 the [Disaster Management Act was passed](#) in Bangladesh after two years of advocacy work by the ECB agencies. The Bangladesh consortium will continue working with the Government on the implementation of the Act post ECB Phase 2. There was an expectation from the Government and other stakeholders in the humanitarian sector that the ECB Project would continue to work on the Disaster Management Act; therefore it's hard for the consortium in Bangladesh to acknowledge that the ECB Project at the global level is coming to an end.
- The CAHB in Bolivia spent the first two years working together to build trust. It took a lot of meetings to achieve this and initially they did not work on initiatives together. After this time, though, they were able to call each other and share information. When dealing with the UN or the Bolivian Government, it was important for them that they were viewed as one entity. During emergencies the UN wanted to be the lead humanitarian organization but they realised they needed the approval and support of the CAHB. It was decided that the government would lead and the UN and the consortium would both have one vote. The level of interaction between the agencies became stronger and as a result they decided as a consortium to present a proposal to the HIF, which failed, but led them to open a funding group to work together. Two to three agencies wanted to work towards this proposal and all the agencies wanted to prepare their own proposal but at the end of 2012 the agencies decided to present one DIPECHO proposal and all the agencies gave staff time to help. They worked with their funding teams and focal points from each agency. There was space for each agency to be part of the proposal and to specialise in their area of expertise. CARE was chosen to lead the proposal. The government also contacted the consortium to help them review the country's Disaster Law 2140 and to strengthen capacity at the local level which showed the government's trust and respect.

## 2013

- In 2013 the CAHB agreed on a MoU to continue to work as a consortium until 2015. The [DIPECHO proposal was also approved](#) in this period.

### *Key comments:*

- Niger consistently had communications problems that were hard to overcome. Maybe the Project came at an opportune moment for some regions but too early for others.
- The stories from the consortia are amazing. The question is what will happen now that the ECB Project is closing? What alternatives are there?
- The second phase was designed to have the field at heart, what is missing is the Objective 2 achievements and agency level change.
- The decision not to initiate a third phase sent a big message to the field consortia about how the Project is viewed at the global level. What learning has there been at the agency level? If the consortia want to continue to collaborate at the country level will they be supported by the agencies at the global level?
- There have been some amazing achievements, including how the Project has influenced the humanitarian architecture. How will the final evaluation reflect this? How do we capture our achievements? It is important for global learning that evaluations take forth these lessons. The ECB Project should work to make sure this is included in the final evaluation. Also, the 'unintentional outcomes' have been very important and should be included in the evaluation as a theme.
- **Principals and IWG members – when information from the evaluation comes back it is important to highlight the lessons and share them to make the most of the lessons from the Project.**
- **It is also important to understand where and why the Project did not work – why was it so much harder in the Horn of Africa?**

### Field Facilitators- perspectives

- [Indonesia](#) – A large amount of time in Phase 1 and 2 was spent building trust among the consortium agencies. In Phase 2 this led to success as the [Disaster Response Engagement Protocols \(DREP\)](#) were agreed upon. *Challenges:* Internal turnover was high; externally the structure was complicated which made communication with the global team difficult and as a result initiatives sometimes felt top down. *Changes:* When trust developed things became more open and transparent. For example, during the Merapi volcanic eruption in 2010, agencies shared information, a process which became easier and quicker during subsequent disasters. Staffing and joint facilitation became easier too. *Recommendation:* Each agency had one or two focal points but they had their own activities to implement. They should have had ECB responsibilities as part of their performance plan so their work was taken into account and ownership would have been



higher. *Future*: The consortium held a visioning workshop to collect ideas from focal points and agencies about what they want to work on in the future. The Country Directors are willing to continue the collaboration although they are not sure of the structure yet. They may still use the ECB brand.

- [Bangladesh](#) – *Achievements*: ECB has a strong identity in Bangladesh and helped to create non-competitive relationships. INGOs did not share their own plans but have now become transparent. Institutionalizing a Joint Needs Assessment process, and the joint advocacy work that took place to pass the Disaster Management Act, were significant achievements in Bangladesh, which reflect ECB’s joint strength. Women’s inclusion in the ENHance program was also highly appreciated by the country’s NGOs. The ECB is seen as a brand of collaboration in Bangladesh. *Future*: They plan to continue to work on DRR, as they focused on this the least in Phase 2, specifically on urban DRR.
- [Bolivia](#) – *Challenges*: Building trust and testing tools in the field. It was hard to translate some of the tools given the language and context. *Achievements*: The ECB process was an important mechanism for Bolivia. Now they are a consortium recognised by the UN and the Bolivian Government. The Country Directors have decided to continue the collaboration; an MoU was signed for two years with a special strategic plan. Agencies have provided funding to continue certain initiatives and they will continue with, for example, the AIM group, as they are the only agency that does this in the country.
- [Horn of Africa](#) – *Achievements*: Primarily related to partnerships, for example the partnership with ACAPs, which started with a needs assessment that built capacity in Somalia and opened the door for wider collaboration and the development of the [Kenya Initial Rapid Assessment](#) (KIRA). Secondly, the use of multi-agency simulations. Some were very successful, others less so, but all clearly highlighted gaps for each agency to address. *Challenges*: Finding a niche in the HoA and getting the agencies in the region to engage. ECB was not part of their strategies. The Project was conceived of for the greater good but if an agency didn’t directly benefit it was difficult for them to engage. In some instances this was complicated by regional offices but also it was related to personal engagement, not organisational engagement necessarily. Another challenge was communication between different levels within agencies – this wasn’t an ECB problem but rather an agency problem. *Future*: ECB has left a void that has been filled by other initiatives, for example Save the Children is developing a learning academy and is making efforts to begin work in the region.
- How did the food crisis in the Horn impact ECB? Rather than take focus away from capacity building the food crisis created a trigger to start joint initiatives. In 2011 the consortium collaborated with ACAPs and the [Joint Standards Initiative](#) developed. ECB was central to this process.
- Was the challenge dealing with the regional offices who were not involved in operational activities and were only involved when there was an operational issue in their countries? With three countries there were lots of people to deal with. The ECB Field Facilitator said it was only manageable for him to have one focal point for each agency to talk to all three

countries. He had to find people to have a voice for him in the different countries and some were unhappy since it was seen as an obligation.

- *Niger – Achievements:* The [ENHance program](#) to develop national staff capacity and the creation of a forum for Niger to work with ACAPS, who provided technical expertise for needs assessments at the regional and national level. *Challenges:* The biggest was engagement, a lot of time and effort was needed just to get a meeting. *Changes:* The cluster system in Niger was limited. ECB provided a forum whereby relationships were built and pre-positioned and Country Directors were open to this. *Future:* There is interest in continuing collaboration but nothing has been agreed.
- The Project hasn't made the same impact in Niger.
- There was tension between local NGOs and the government and maybe there is room for improvement in this area.
- Comparing the participants who undertook simulations in Niger in 2010 and 2012 there was clear growth. Participants became more engaged and wanted to learn in 2012 as opposed to the first simulation in 2010.

### Technical advisors

*Disaster Risk Reduction* – At the start of the Project most of the technical advisors knew each other because they had worked together previously, but the Project created a better network for new members to join. The group worked well together.

- *Achievements:* When the group had a task at hand, for example the development of the Toward Resilience Guide, they worked very well. There was a lot of information sharing but this was not necessarily because of ECB, as many of the advisors already collaborated as part of the InterAction DRR group. ECB was international which added new perspectives.
- *Challenges:* The DRR group didn't engage with the consortia as much as they could have. Perhaps this should have been addressed by agencies working directly with the countries on which they led. Also, there was not a lot of cross collaboration amongst the advisory groups. It was a flat structure. An unintended consequence was that the ECB group deflated the InterAction DRR group and created a sort of exclusion zone for others.
- *Toward Resilience:* The process was extremely laborious but it needed to be collaborative. The consortia's commitment and help was fantastic. The TR guide forces the advisors to be collaborative in the future as all six agencies' logos are represented. If it is re-edited and one agency chooses not to be part of the process, the absence of their logo would reflect badly on them. A key lesson is that it is important for one agency to own the copyright for a tool / resource and therefore have responsibility. This makes them a gatekeeper.
- In the HoA the ECB Project was just one among dozens of groups and committees trying to do the same thing. **In the future, capacity building programs should be set up where there are gaps / niches only.**

Accountability and Impact Measurement - The comments above hold true across all the groups. The AIM group was very active in the first few years of the Project but in the last year initiatives slowed as ECHO funding stopped.

- *Achievements:* Putting communities back into focus, developing an accountability framework, as well as tools and resources and influencing the IASC. The [AIM Standing Team](#) was also a real success with six deployments in 2012. Strong relationships were developed in the AIM group which can be built on post ECB.
- *Future:* The AIM group plan to keep in touch as they have created a one page ToR outlining what they want to achieve in the future.

Staff Capacity – The same successes outlined above apply to the Staff Capacity group.

- One challenge was the large amount of time it took to participate. Staff time was not part of job descriptions and was not funded. In the end Oxfam ended up leading on staff capacity initiatives because the cadre has not been built formally enough.

### Agency Managers

#### *Successes:*

- The creation of important and useful tools and the broad acceptance of simulations as a preparedness tool. Staff turnover was positive in some regards because it enabled a broader range of people to gain experience of collaboration. There was a growth of trust and information sharing, and managers felt as much a part of the agency manager group as their own organisation. The Agency Improvement Plans (AIPs) were an important initiative that gave agencies the opportunity to talk to each other and share learning before implementing new projects. For CARE, some of the tools and resources that were created are now embedded into its internal systems.
- Implementation was part of the success – in Bolivia a few quick initiatives led by the Country Directors helped to gain momentum, which increased engagement. Secondly, they decided the project was not about money. Often collaboration is used to get money but they were part of the project to build trust and create a better future. Even within Oxfam it was hard to meet and work between affiliates and now Oxfam is trying to do what ECB did a few years ago to build trust.

#### *Challenges:*

- ECB was not given due importance when there was staff turnover. The agency managers felt uneasy due to varying job descriptions and roles and responsibilities. The advisors who participated at the start of the initiative were passionate; however, as roles and responsibilities changed ECB became one of many priorities. It was not written into job descriptions and this tended to reduce commitment and time. Even when the Project was part of a job description other priorities, such as deployments, took away staff focus. The design of the project did not adapt to the financial crisis. The Project maintained its obligations without the resources to meet them.

- The agencies underestimated the project management task, particularly driving change at the agency level. It was difficult to deliver at the agency level due to the way the AIPs were designed. The agencies missed an opportunity with the mid-term evaluation and not enough consideration was given to the recommendations made in the report.

*Changes:*

- Five years is too long for a humanitarian project and lots of things change in this time. For World Vision five years created a fatigue of ECB. The idea that in 3,4,5 years the Project could continue fundraising was highly optimistic. This created a schism – the teams initially on the ground decided the goals, but the Project team at the global level did the fundraising and the donors had their own ideas about what should be included in the proposal. This created different objectives which took the attention away from the field. At the beginning, the field led the proposals but after it took a long time to raise funds priorities changed, and the consortia then felt it was a top down approach, although the intention was to be bottom up. During this time period most of the agencies involved went through an ‘internationalization’ and ‘centralisation’ process which affected their ability to engage with ECB.
- **If an idea is not designed with implementation in mind lots of problems are created – e.g. no preparation for staff turnover.**

**Principals**

*Challenges:*

- It was hard at first for the Principals to understand the Project and to understand how to work with each other. Trust developed in the group but it took time and this was a major challenge. It was difficult to engage at the level of the Principals since most were in positions that made it impossible to get things done due to the structure. The agency managers had the same problem.
- There was a disconnect between the field and headquarters, even within single organisations. Initially, the commitment to match funding took energy to deal with and prevented the Principals from making programmatic decisions. As Principals they were probably not honest enough about the staff time issue and did not have a good internal accountability initiative.
- Also, they never felt the commitment necessary from the senior levels of the agencies involved. As Principals they did not pressure the senior levels of their agencies enough, which could have made a difference.
- They are not sure they have delivered as Principals; twice a year they got together and talked about money and deliverables, but in terms of supporting the Project and getting to know the consortia they could have done more. However, was this realistic? Probably not.
- The ECB HoA Field Facilitator says he hoped this reflection would have driven a third phase – a lighter more independent machine for the agencies and Principals with a

narrower scope and reduced expectations. The Principals know there is disappointment about phase III and have felt it in the room today. In April they spoke and felt that at some point the Project would have to come to an end. They had a hard time trying to come up with a third phase design and in the end decided it wouldn't be beneficial enough – even though it was working and things were going well in certain consortia. There is a passion that can be felt in this room and this shouldn't be dependent on contractual obligations. Will consortia initiatives continue? Have we learnt enough?

### *Achievements:*

- The Project managed to hit its fundraising goals in spite of the challenges and this was an incredible effort.
- CRS feels it really benefitted from the AIM and capacity building work. Getting resources for capacity building is difficult and the fact that Gates supported this Project is really important.
- The ECB label is not important, if CEOs don't know about ECB it doesn't matter, it is more important that the ways of working have been established – although this is harder to demonstrate as 'success'. The design of M & E systems does not capture this, unfortunately, and although this comes out in the narrative it is really hard to justify or get across. Something to consider is how to link a project like this back to a sound M & E structure.

### *Changes:*

- The financial crisis was a huge obstacle but donor obligations remained. Given the fundraising challenges maybe objectives could have been revised at the mid-term evaluation.
- There could have been a better system of communication where one agency led at the country level. In Bolivia this happened and Oxfam led the consortium. It is evident at the global level that the regional structure was left out of the design– the regional structure needs to be built in to the architecture.

### *Key reflections:*

- We've done great work together, we haven't transformed the agencies or the sector but we've made an impact and we need to take lessons learnt and apply them in the future. Question – Is the ECB a brand and what can we do in the future?
- Within many organisations they are arguing about income and where it comes from. Approximately one third of income is for humanitarian response and this isn't always understood by all parts of the organisation who see themselves as sponsorship organisations.
- The ECB was conceived of by the Principals and it is surprising that they are saying it hasn't changed the agencies or changed processes. There is a missing link between the progress at the consortium level and institutionalisation at the regional and global level.

The START network (formerly the Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies) is creating a new capacity building initiative and it would be wise to share learning with this organisation.

### ECB team

#### *Achievements:*

- There was far more engagement from the advisors when the thematic groups had a project to work on.
- The [case studies](#) have really helped to capture and disseminate learning.
- The statistics for downloads and website visits are impressive and show the substantial growth in interest in the Project and its initiatives.
- It has been important to learn that the six agencies have similarities and are not so different.

#### *Challenges:*

- The ECB Project team have had a difficult time trying to facilitate and not to manage.
- It takes a long time to understand the structure of such a complex project.
- There have been difficulties working across different countries and time zones, does proximity help collaboration and trust?
- Internally there was a disconnect between the different groups in the Project, especially the consortia and the thematic groups and Principals.
- The changes caused by the financial crisis made a real negative impact, two of the three objective managers left and perhaps at this stage activities should have been dropped at the agency level.
- Reporting has been very difficult, agencies do not use the same systems and different processes have made it very challenging. **A lesson would be to try and create one system for reporting that all agencies could access and use so that the method is standardised and much more efficient.**

#### *Future:*

- In principle, the ECB website will remain live for a further 1-2 years and will be maintained by the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP).

*Recommendations:*

- The Principals were very busy and travel often which limited their involvement in the Project. Most of these agencies have learning departments or capacity development specialists which the ECB Project could have used.
- The importance of face to face meetings should not be underestimated, especially with staff in the consortia. The original design was to meet on a quarterly basis but changes crippled this. It would have been great for this whole group to meet once a year.

To find out more, visit the ECB Project website at [www.ecbproject.org](http://www.ecbproject.org)