APRIL 2009

Feinstein International Center

Strengthening the humanity and dignity of people in crisis through knowledge and practice

One For All and All For One:
Intra-Organizational Dynamics in Humanitarian Action

Mackinnon Webster, Peter Walker

Tufts UNIVERSITY | Gerald J. and Dorothy R. Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy

Cover image: Aid workers hand out ice to IDPs in Jalala camp, Mardan District, North West Frontier Province (NFWP)
© Shabbir Hussain Imam/IRIN

©2009 Feinstein International Center. All Rights Reserved.

Fair use of this copyrighted material includes its use for non-commercial educational purposes, such as teaching, scholarship, research, criticism, commentary, and news reporting. Unless otherwise noted, those who wish to reproduce text and image files from this publication for such uses may do so without the Feinstein International Center's express permission. However, all commercial use of this material and/or reproduction that alters its meaning or intent, without the express permission of the Feinstein International Center, is prohibited.

Feinstein International Center
Tufts University
200 Boston Ave., Suite 4800
Medford, MA 02155
USA
tel: +1 617.627.3423
fax: +1 617.627.3428
fic.tufts.edu

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was funded and commissioned by Oxfam America. We are grateful to colleagues at Oxfam America for their support and for colleagues in Amnesty-International, CARE International, Lutheran World Federation, Save the Children and World Vision International for all of their help and advice in completing this work.

One For All and All For One: Intra-Organizational Dynamics in Humanitarian Action

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is the result of a study commissioned by Oxfam America to explore multi-member organizations. We examined the field response systems and structures of six NGOs to understand how they function during emergencies. A description of the organizations is included in the report. We identify six key learning points that are important for multi-member organizations operating in emergency contexts:

- having the right people, at the right time, in the right place;
- knowing who you are and what you do;
- executing the strategy;
- being ready to respond;
- managing intra-organizational tensions; and,
- using transparency as an aid to action.

BACKGROUND: WHY IS THIS TOPIC IMPORTANT?

In 2008, economic costs of disasters totaled an estimated US$181 billion, nearly four times the cost in 2000, and affected 211 million people worldwide.[1] Consolidated Humanitarian Appeals, which are consistently underfunded, have grown nearly every year (See Figure 1). The humanitarian community has become a complex enterprise that spends billions and affects the lives of millions. Despite this growth in resources and responsibility, many of the systems and structures that deliver critical humanitarian aid have operated in a loosely coordinated manner. In recent years, leading humanitarian NGOs have moved to invest in better understanding how their systems and structures affect their ability to respond effectively and efficiently to humanitarian emergencies.

In many cases, humanitarian NGOs were founded by concerned individuals to respond to an unmet need. Over the years, the organizations expanded their missions and programs to respond to new needs in new geographical areas. Some organizations intentionally established offices throughout the globe to increase capacity and improve effectiveness in resource mobilization and management for responding to these needs. Others joined forces with like-minded organizations that were based in other countries. The result, and what we have today, is large, multi-tiered, complex, and scattered organizations – often federations or confederations. The largest international humanitarian NGOs all operate in some form of a multi-member structure with varying degrees of centralized coordination.

This complexity comes with challenges. Growth in size has forced organizations to manage complementary, and competing, agendas and goals. Diversity within organizations leads to creativity, but also influences assumptions, opinions, and worldviews. In some cases, the changing nature of organizations has increased the distance between those facing the realities on the ground and those who are creating policy and generating strategy. Many humanitarian NGOs' mandates have expanded to involve international advocacy, peacebuilding, or development. Additionally, many development NGOs have expanded their missions to include humanitarian efforts. This shift influences how resources are spent and how organizations are structured and managed.

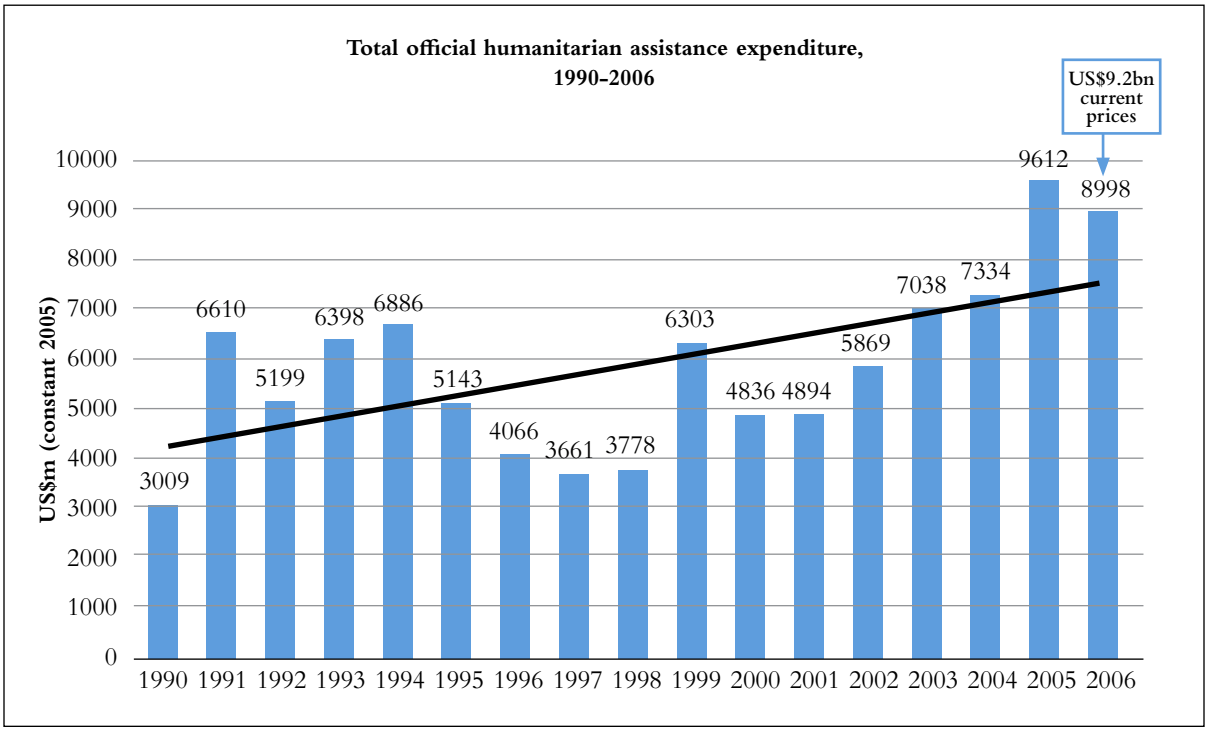
At the same time, external pressures have required that organizations become more flexible, faster, more robust, and, increasingly, work in environments that press the limits of security and safety. Climate change will likely impact the frequency and intensity of disasters; civilians and humanitarian workers are increasingly targets in conflict zones; public and media attention broadcast successes and failures on 24-hour news cycles; global financial uncertainty translates into doing

more with less; and, the interconnectedness of the global economy means that failed crops in Australia could impact food security in East Africa. These realities shape how organizations go about their work and how they plan for the future.

NGOs are now asking themselves how they can best organize to do the work that they need to do. Will they be more effective with a highly centralized decision-making body that guides action in the field? Is it more efficient to push leadership as close to the ground as possible? Who should lead planning processes? What should be the role of regional offices? In strengthening and improving an organization, these are all questions that should be asked. There is not a one-size-fits-all approach – each organization has evolved with different realities, strengths, and challenges that shape their responses to these questions and challenges.

All of the organizations involved in this project reported that they are in the middle of a process of assessing the current structure of their humanitarian response efforts and planning for future operations. This research aims to illuminate how six NGOs operate at the country level and how they are planning for future operations. We apply learning from relevant organizational studies that can inform how organizations might respond to common challenges while working in the complex environment of humanitarian emergencies. Our hope is that this research will help to clarify and support organizational change within the humanitarian sector so that organizations can increase effectiveness and efficiency, ultimately improving the lives of their beneficiaries while balancing local needs and global realities.

Figure 1. Official Humanitarian Expenditure 1990-2006 (Source: Development Initiatives)



METHODOLOGY

This research project couples an agency review and a literature review to understand 1) how 6 NGOs actually operate and 2) what organizational studies learning can be applied within the humanitarian sector. The report is based primarily on the agency reviews and supported, where applicable, by the literature available.

Agency Review

The Feinstein International Center (FIC), in conjunction with Oxfam America, requested the participation of six international agencies in this project – five from within the humanitarian sector and one external organization. The five humanitarian organizations are:

- CARE International
- The Lutheran World Federation
- Oxfam International
- Save the Children Alliance
- World Vision International

One additional organization, Amnesty International, was intentionally chosen from outside the humanitarian sector with the expectation that it may provide additional learning that could be applied within the humanitarian community.

All of the organizations approached agreed to participate, many noting that they were undergoing their own internal reviews as well. Phone interviews were conducted with each agency, and, in most cases, the director of humanitarian operations/humanitarian policy or a deputy director was interviewed.[2] Field-level staff members were not interviewed. As the scope of this research included the headquarters' leadership within each organization, many of the discussions focused on policies and how the structure and systems are *supposed* to work, yet, most of the NGOs discussed challenges that influence how the structure and systems *actually* function. We requested key policy and organizational documents from each agency to supplement information shared during interviews. As a result of these interviews and a review of key organizational documents, FIC conducted a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats analysis of each organization's operations. Based on these analyses, we identified overarching themes and trends to be included in this report.

Literature Review

This research also includes a literature review on a range of relevant topics. It is difficult to narrow thinking to a single field or body of theory that would capture the diverse issues that affect organizations that work in emergency settings. As such, we have drawn from literature that relates to:

- organizational change, organizational behavior, and organizational design theory;
- network theory; and,
- theories that addresses working in complex/emergency environments, including military studies.

This research is first and foremost based on the practical knowledge learned from the agency reviews, but, where useful, we have aimed to include discussion of the literature review.

BACKGROUND: LITERATURE REVIEW

In a review of relief and development NGOs, Lindenberg and Bryant provide a thorough review of models of NGO structures and general characteristics of NGO families.[3] They state that most Northern NGOs are typically horizontally grouped with limited hierarchy—many have transitioned to more centralized organizational structures and later transitioned back to loosely coordinated structures. Critical of organizational change processes that organizations have attempted, the authors assert, "it is not yet clear that they have become more flexible and adaptable as opposed to simply big."[4]

Lindenberg and Bryant raise the issue of quality, long a concern within the private sector, as affiliates' varying degrees of quality impact brand loyalty and image protection. Federations must work against Gresham's Law where the quality of the weakest member affects the perception of the entire organization. Yet, loose coordination models, as is the case with many NGOs, creates a difficult environment in which to enforce common norms and standards.

The authors describe a continuum along which a fivefold classification system of NGO structures exists: 1) separate independent organizations, 2) weak umbrella coordination, 3) confederations, 4) federations, and 5) unitary, corporate organizations. The characteristics of each model are highlighted in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Models of NGO Families (Source: Adapted from Lindenberg and Bryant)

	Separate Independent Orgs and Coalitions	Weak umbrella coordination	Confederations	Federations	Unitary, Corporate
Decision-making	Individual members	Individual members	Center has weak coordinating capacity (w/ strong members)	Center has strong authority over system-wide decisions	Central
Who sets global norms	No one	Individual members	Members w/ central coordination	Central HQ with board	Central HQ with board
Central enforcement mechanisms	None	Weak moral suasion	Moral suasion and limited sanctions	Stronger sanctions (e.g. withholding)	Strong central enforcement and incentives
Resource acquisition/ allocation	At member level	At member level	Primarily at member level	Member level and common/central	Central and global
Common systems	At member level	At member level	A few (e.g. financial)	More common systems	Common systems
Common name	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Common logo	No	Sometimes	Sometimes	Often	Often

Lastly, Lindenberg and Bryant identify common tensions that exist in NGO families regardless of the structure, including: 1) developing common principles; 2) agreement on branding policies; 3) fundraising roles and limitations; 4) agreement on who develops and carries out advocacy at the global and local levels; 5) coordinating operational work where multiple members are present; and 6) developing common systems and structures.

In an earlier study of federated organizations, Provan discusses the difficulty of convincing affiliates within an organization to give control over to central management.[5] He argues that in return for greater central control, the federation's management must minimize complexity within the network and reduce uncertainty for the individual affiliates. He discusses work by Pfeffer and Salanik that reasons that as organizations grow more complicated and interdependent, a centralized or hierarchical structure emerges to manage these linkages and interdependencies. Provan distinguishes between participatory federations where affiliates are actively involved in the management of the federation and independent federations where there is minimal interaction among affiliates and the central organization manages issues within the federation (See Figure 3). He asserts that smaller federations are more likely to follow the participatory federation model, and that higher levels of cooperation among affiliates increases the likelihood of goal sharing within the federation.

Provan raises two ways in which central management can gain influence or control of strategic-level decisions within a federation:

Figure 3. Characteristics of Federations (Source: Provan)

Network Characteristics	Participatory Federation	Independent Federation
Basis for affiliation	Mutual benefit, stability, complexity reduction	Mutual benefit, stability, complexity reduction, legitimacy
Participation of affiliates in management	Moderate	Low
Number of affiliates	Moderate	Moderate to many
Importance of federation for legitimacy	Low to Moderate	Moderate to high
Essentiality (importance of the issues)	High	Low to high
Substitutability of central organization (capacity to obtain services elsewhere)	Moderate to moderately high	Moderate to low

resource essentiality and substitutability. Resource essentiality describes the level of importance of the resources provided by the central body to the affiliates. The greater importance of the resources provided, the more ability a central management group will be able to influence the strategic decisions of affiliates and the overall federation. Substitutability refers to the ability of the affiliates to obtain resources provided by the federation elsewhere or on their own. If the resources provided cannot be obtained elsewhere, then the central body will have greater influence.

A previous research project at the Feinstein International Center found four critical issues to keep in mind when working within federated structures:[6]

- ***Dual persona*** – working within a federated system can be difficult for affiliates as they have to manage needs/expectations of their own along with those of the entire organization. People within the center of the federation must remain aware of this reality as they make requests of the affiliates. Well-functioning federations will support their members both to be local and global at the same time.
- ***Subsidiarity*** – the central body should only do what cannot be done at the affiliate level. Decisions and tasks should be carried out as close to the grassroots level as possible. On their own, most systems will naturally centralize power, so federations must be conscious about keeping the center light.
- ***Relationships*** – most federations do not have a command and control structure; instead, work is done through relationship building. The Secretariat will not be successful unless they are able to build trust and communication with the affiliates, so that the members believe that they are acting with their own interest in mind. In emergencies, relationships will work best if expectations are established and managed ahead of time.
- ***Power dynamics*** – most federated structures have asymmetric power structures determined by member characteristics, e.g. a wealthier member, a larger member, etc. One of the realities is that most of the structures that are federal in nature were started with a founding member who, often, continues to have the most resources or is the largest member. This affects power dynamics. An organization does not want to make the mistake of acting as if all members are equal. Addressing power imbalances means being aware of and managing inequalities.

In two recent articles, Weiss and Hoffman discuss the humanitarian community's challenge of creating learning organizations, and Clarke and Ramalingam explore constraints and opportunities related to organizational change in the humanitarian sector.[7] These articles highlight fundamental aspects of humanitarian organizations – structures, approaches, and processes that inhibit improvement and adaptation that is necessary to respond to changing global dynamics. Weiss and Hoffman call for increased information gathering and sharing, advanced policy analysis, and better planning processes. Clarke and Ramalingam propose clarifying organizational purpose, paying greater attention to motivations and incentives, strengthening leadership development efforts, supporting cross-organizational change initiatives, and making significant efforts within organizations to try out new ways of working.

These authors lay the groundwork for understanding what is really going on in the six organizations that are included in this report. Each organization is complex and faces a unique set of challenges with a unique set of strengths. Yet, common trends emerge as each NGO aims to be as effective and efficient as possible while adapting to address new global realities and improve humanitarian action.

ORGANIZATIONAL DESCRIPTIONS

Care International

Global-level organization

CARE is composed of 12 members, four of which have dedicated capacity for emergency response. CARE Emergency Group (CEG) leads emergency functions within CARE International. The CEG has two branches: the Emergency Operations Coordination branch and the Capacity Development branch. A number of CARE members have separate emergency response units that do not report directly through the CEG, including CARE Australia, CARE US, CARE UK, and CARE Canada.

The member's emergency units and the CEG are bound together through a common CARE Emergency Strategy, so even without formal reporting lines, they work interdependently. The development of CARE's global Emergency Strategy is led by an advisory group, which meets every six months, and defines strategic objectives, focus areas, and areas of responsibility among themselves. The various emergency units have agreed to implement different parts of the overall Emergency Strategy. For example, CARE US is responsible for preparedness planning, supply chain management, logistics, emergency security, and staff development. CARE Australia is responsible for water and sanitation and CARE UK has taken the lead on shelter issues. Within the Emergency Strategy, CARE identified three priority areas – food security, water and sanitation, and shelter – each one being led by a different affiliate.

The current Emergency Strategy is in the third year of implementation. Thus far, the focus has remained on building basic capacity, establishing protocols and procedures, and bringing together the different CARE practices in to one emergency tool kit.

Figure 4. Key Data from NGOs in the Study (Source: Interviews with organizations)

	Number of Members	Number of Country Operations	Approx. Annual Humanitarian Expenditures (US$)
Care International	12	65	NA
Lutheran World Federation	140	35	$110 million *(2008)*
Oxfam International	14	104	$196.5 million *(2006/2007)*
Save The Children Alliance	27	110	NA
World Vision	65	Aprox. 98	$644.2 million

Country-level structure

All country-level offices are representative of CARE International and operate under a Lead Member model. Among the 60+ countries where CARE is working, CARE US is the Lead Member in approximately 40 countries, CARE UK in 10, CARE Canada in 11, and CARE Australia in 4. Any staff seconded during an emergency would come under the management of the existing country office and country director. Generally, outside staff act in an advisory role, and, in rare cases, the Secretary-General of CARE International or the director of CEG will designate a team leader from outside the country to lead response efforts.

At the country level, CARE reports that the Lead Member model has significantly improved coordination. Most countries have a preparedness plan in place and are in the process of identifying and training country-level emergency response teams. A mid-term evaluation has just been completed that will provide more information on the success of the model.

Emergency response structure and procedures

During a crisis, the CEG brings together a decision-making entity called a Crisis Coordination Group composed of affiliate member representatives from emergency units, regional directors, the country director, and a representative from CEG. This group is responsible for determining how a response should be initiated and what types of interventions need to take place.

Ultimately, the country director is responsible for the initiation of a response based around the CARE Humanitarian Mandate that establishes what all country offices should do in a time of crisis. Within CARE, there is an expectation that the organization will respond to an emergency in all countries where they are present. In places where CARE is not present, an assessment would be made to determine if CARE should have a response. If so, the CEG would take the lead until a member within CARE takes over responsibility for the operation.

Figure 5. Sample Emergency Response Structure[a]

CARE Emergency Group and the emergency units of individual CARE agencies, along with the Crisis Coordination Group that is established by CEG for each crisis, all support the lead agency in carrying out response activities.

a) Sample Response Structure Organizational Charts have been developed for each agency. These charts are not the official chart of the organization, instead, they are based on the interviews and documents provided for this research project and seek to illustrate the relationship between headquarter entities and field structures. The color of the Sample Response Structure Organizational Chart indicates the relative level of cohesion based on this study: Red indicates a highly cohesive design, blue indicates moderately cohesive, and green indicates loosely cohesive.

Resource allocation

All 12 CARE members are involved in fundraising with their respective constituents. These members may play a role in overseeing the allocation and spending of funding received. However, during an emergency, all resources for response activities are allocated to the Lead Member and are routed directly to the national office in charge of the response.

Advocacy

The Lead Member is responsible for supporting advocacy activities around a humanitarian emergency. CARE International supports advocacy activities at the global level, but the primary responsibility for developing and disseminating advocacy messages is with the Lead Member and their agency's headquarters.

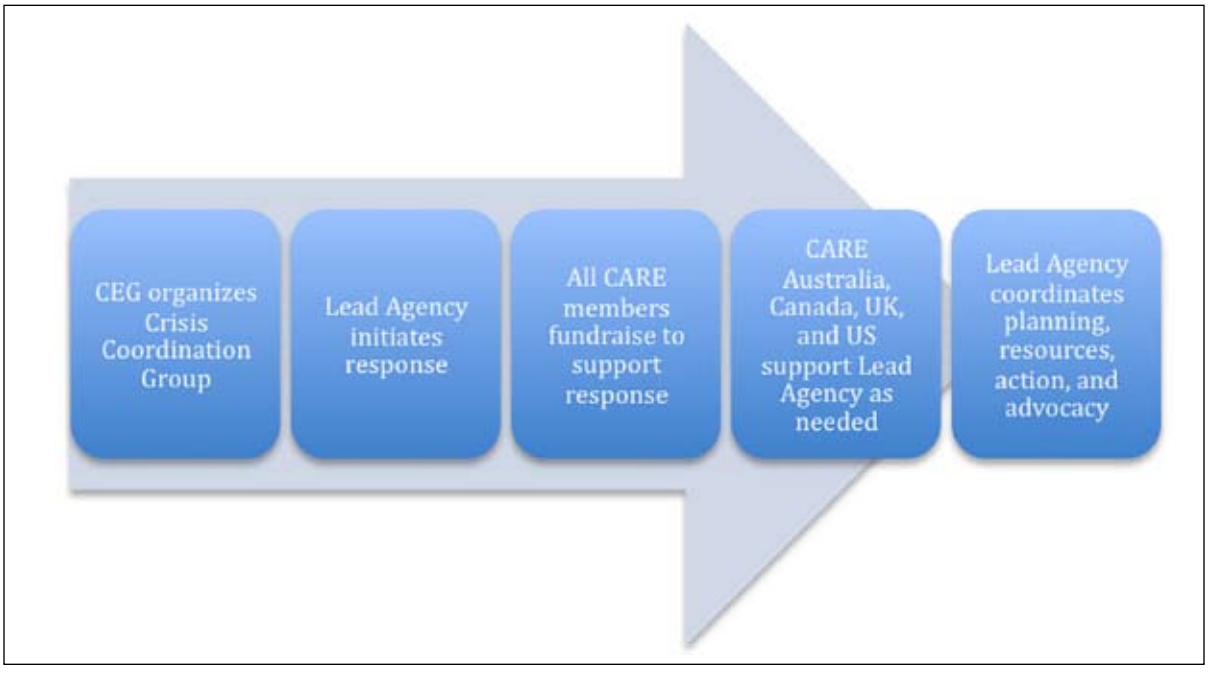
Unique organizational aspects

Lead Member model – CARE is the only organization within this study that has operationalized a single lead model in all countries where it is present, including their development and humanitarian work. They report that this shift has been successful in clarifying CARE's role in emergencies and has improved coordination at the country level. In the transition to the Lead Member model, CARE has invested in retaining the capacity that already existed throughout the various entities of the organization and in improving that capacity in a coordinated manner.

Country-level preparedness – CARE has prioritized investment in developing capacity at the country level. CARE places emphasis on national response teams and national preparedness plans as opposed to a large international response and surge capacity structure.

Accountability framework – CARE is in the process of developing an accountability framework that allows them to be more accountable to donors and to beneficiaries. This will allow CARE to measure their work, program quality indicators, performance expectations, and better inform decision makers of the state of their emergency programs.

Figure 6. Sample Emergency Actions Chart[b]



b) Sample Emergency Actions Charts have been developed for each agency. These charts are not the official chart of the organization, instead, they are based on the interviews and documents provided for this research project and seek to illustrate key steps and decision making in a typical emergency response operation. These charts do not include a number of issues, including advocacy efforts during an emergency.

Lutheran World Federation

Global-level organization

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is a communion of 140 member churches from 79 different countries. The Department for World Service (DWS) is part of the LWF Secretariat, based in Geneva, Switzerland. DWS is the humanitarian and development arm of the LWF and has an operating/programming presence in 35 countries. There is a specific humanitarian focus in approximately seven of the country programs. Many Lutheran churches around the world carry out humanitarian work independently as separate, legal entities, but this is distinct from the humanitarian work of LWF/DWS.

LWF is the largest member of another federation, Action by Churches Together (ACT), which is comprised of the World Council of Churches and LWF related churches and humanitarian organizations from around the world. Many aspects of LWF's work – including fundraising, advocacy, and programming – are carried out in coordination with ACT.

LWF has six shared programmatic objectives that are applied across the organization and within each country, as appropriate. One mandatory objective integrated into all country strategies is centered on emergency response and disaster preparedness.

Country-level structure

Among the 35 country programs, LWF has seven Associate Programs – former DWS programs that are now independent under local leadership but are still part of the LWF network. In Asia, Southern Africa, and Eastern Africa, country programs participate in regional networks that carry out joint training, planning, and response. At the country-level, LWF works closely with other ACT members in the coordination of appeals, advocacy, and programming.

Each country where LWF is present has a country strategy that is developed by the country team (led by the country director), headquarters' staff, and local stakeholders. All work within the country, including sustainable development and humanitarian work, is based on the country strategy.

Emergency response structure and procedures

When there is an emergency, the first responder is the country program. If the emergency goes beyond their capacity, then staff will be deployed from the LWF global roster. The roster has approximately 160 people available from throughout LWF country programs who have been trained in some aspect of coordination, camp management, water and sanitation, logistics, or other emergency expertise.

Figure 7. Sample Emergency Response Structure
In coordination with Action by Churches Together (ACT), the Department for World Service of the Lutheran World Federation supports their Country Program in humanitarian response. At the national level, the Country Program works with the other ACT members that are present and coordinate a joint appeal and emergency programming.

During a response, the country program retains the leadership. LWF describes their organization as decentralized and believes that the country-level leadership is best placed to make decisions, as they are most familiar with the context and circumstances. During large emergencies, or in countries where LWF does not have a country office, a global team will play a larger role in coordinating the response.

A critical component of LWF's emergency response is their coordination with ACT. Emergency assessments, appeals, and often programs are coordinated with the other members of ACT. In each country, LWF participates in an ACT country forum where interventions and strategies are determined. Each member is responsible for taking on some aspect of the intervention. In some cases, other members from the ACT federation will serve as implementing partners of LWF.

Resource allocation

The Department for World Service does not have specific funds to carry out emergency response. Typically, money is temporarily allocated from a standing Rapid Response Fund to deploy staff from the roster, carry out an assessment, and start an operation. This Fund is later replenished with funds generated from an emergency appeal. LWF issues joint emergency appeals with the other members of ACT present in the country affected by the emergency.

Advocacy

Advocacy is a part of every country program and the country director is charged with the responsibility for leading advocacy efforts. LWF describes their advocacy approach as "by whom, to whom, and for whom" – recognizing that often you are advocating on behalf of affected people. At the global level, the Office for Human Rights and International Affairs leads advocacy efforts in coordination with the country programs.

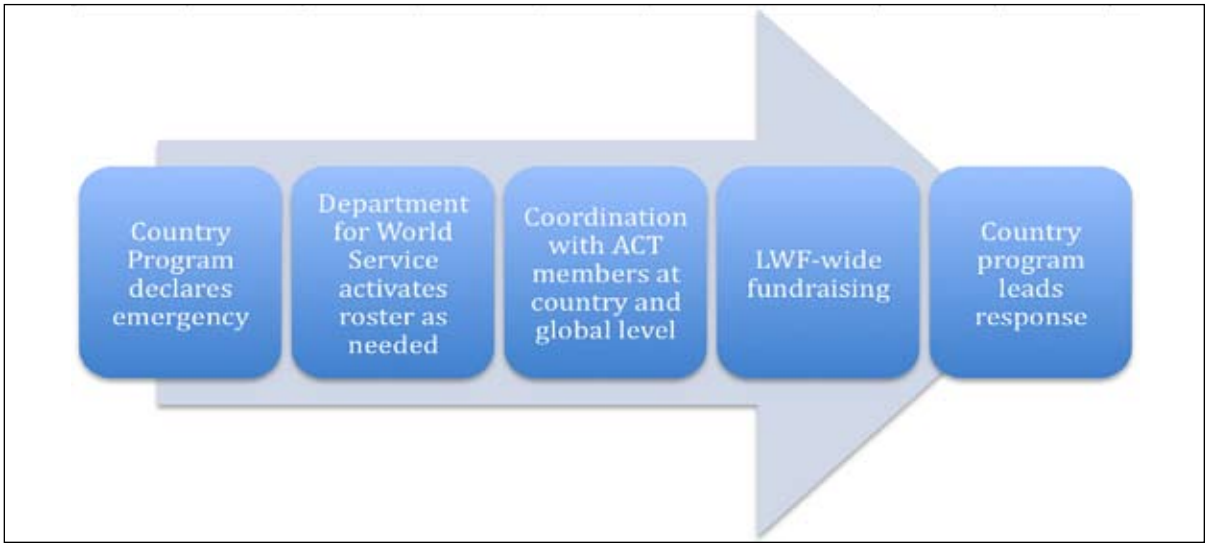
Unique organizational aspects

Multiple layers of federations – operating as a federation within a federation has a large impact on how LWF operates. While LWF reaches out to its own members, mostly to support operations, they also focus considerable effort on coordinating with the other members within ACT.

Faith-based organization – LWF recognizes that being a faith-based organization presents its own strengths and challenges. More and more, they acknowledge, that they are working in situations where there are inter-religion tensions and violence. They are currently exploring what systems they can put in place to ensure that their security procedures are routinely updated to deal with this reality.

Focus on camp management – while LWF is carrying out other humanitarian activities, they have developed a specific organizational expertise on camp management. While many other organizations are carrying out a broader range of activities, LWF has focused specific efforts around developing expertise in this sector.

Figure 8. Sample Emergency Actions Chart



Oxfam International

Global-level organization

Oxfam is a confederation of 14 individual organizations—all of which are involved in humanitarian fundraising and may contribute staff to humanitarian operations. Multiple Oxfam affiliates are often present in the same country and work in a coordinated, however, separate manner. Five affiliates comprise a Humanitarian Consortium (HC) that guides Oxfam-wide humanitarian preparedness, response, and advocacy efforts. The HC has been in operation for five years and is now embarking on a new 5-year strategic cycle period.

Any humanitarian response by an Oxfam affiliate is considered an Oxfam International (OI) response. The Oxfam International Secretariat houses, among other staff, a Humanitarian Director, who supports all humanitarian efforts of Oxfam, and the Rights in Crisis Campaign Management Team that leads humanitarian advocacy efforts.

Country-level structure

Based on a number of criteria, countries are prioritized in a 3-tier system. Within the country, a Lead Agency is appointed by the HC Management Group (HCMG). The Lead Agency is responsible for OI humanitarian preparedness and response, including:

- ensuring the quality of the Contingency Plan;
- monitoring the humanitarian situation;
- declaring and classifying the level of a humanitarian crisis;
- producing an OI Action Plan and Joint Strategy;
- convening and steering a Humanitarian Country Team (HCT);
- providing operational leadership;
- coordinating the use of available funds;
- documenting decision making;
- organizing the evaluation process; and,
- coordinating with external organizations.

Figure 9. Sample Emergency Response Structure

The Lead Agency, with the Humanitarian Country Team, is responsible for leading humanitarian operations. The Lead Agency headquarters provides administrative, financial, and management support to the country level. Additionally, Oxfam International and Oxfam's Humanitarian Consortium, which includes Oxfam affiliates involved in humanitarian response globally, support the Lead Agency.

The HCT is comprised of HC affiliates present in the country, non-Humanitarian Consortium affiliates in the country, and the Lead Agency. Although it is consensus-based, the Lead Agency the lead can make decisions on its own if consensus cannot be reached.

Emergency response structure and procedures

Emergencies are categorized by, among other criteria, the number of people affected. A Category 1 emergency affects at least 2 million people; Category 2 affects 250,000-2 million people; and, a Category 3 affects fewer than 250,000 people. The category of emergency influences Oxfam's response. Oxfam Great Britain (OGB), the largest affiliate, will take over as Lead Agency in any Category 1 emergency. In Category 2 emergencies, OGB will, on occasion, take over as the Lead Agency, but often a pre-assigned Lead Agency from the HC will coordinate the response. And, in Category 3 emergencies the pre-assigned Lead Agency will typically remain in charge of the response. The Lead Agency in the country is responsible for declaring a humanitarian emergency and classifying it.

The Lead Agency is responsible for the carrying out the tasks listed above. The headquarters of the Lead Agency is responsible for providing administrative and management support to the country-level team. OI Secretariat staff may be deployed to support the Lead Agency as needed, and all Oxfam affiliates that are in the HC are required to participate in a response if they are present in the country.

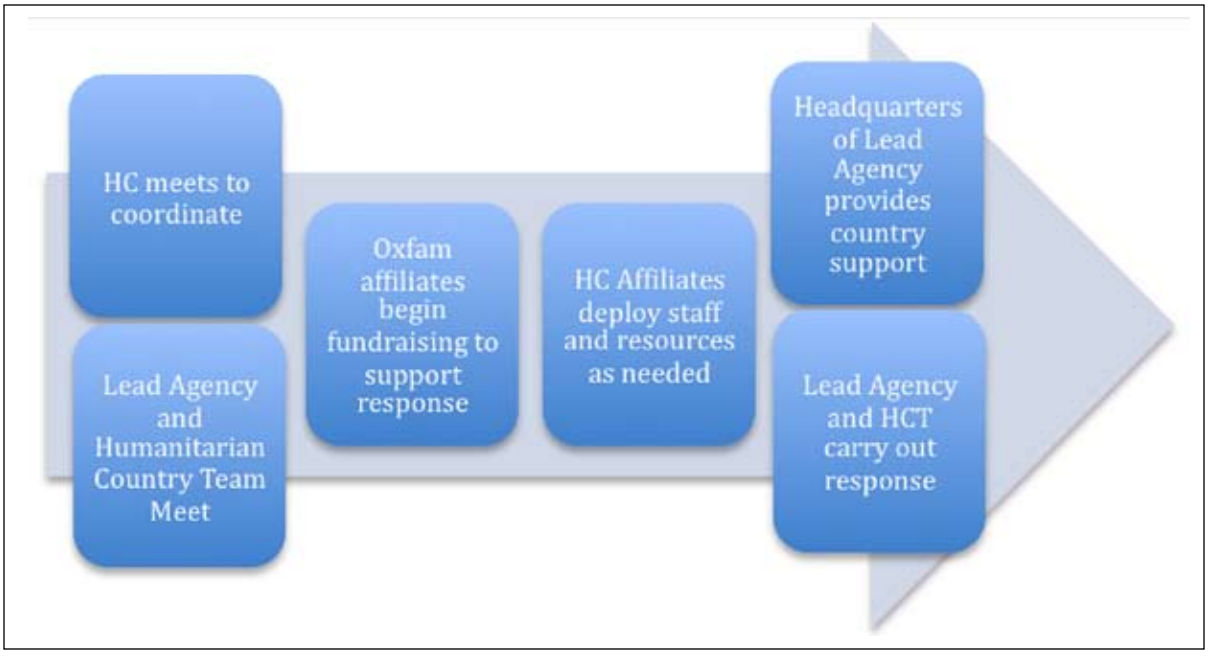
The HCT, under the leadership of the Lead Agency, activates the contingency plan, carries out a situation analysis and preliminary assessment, and develops a joint strategy – ideally within 48 hours of the emergency. Affiliates design and implement their own programs in accordance with the contingency plans, action plans, and joint strategy.

Concurrently, at the beginning of a major emergency, the global-level HCMG meets to discuss issues of coordination, affiliate programs and capacity, an analysis of the overall situation, and which resources should be allocated. A number of bi-lateral exchanges also take place between affiliates.

Resource allocation

All Oxfam affiliates are involved in humanitarian fundraising. The Lead Agency plays a coordinating role in regard to allocating the funding received. A common Funding Grid is used to list the different projects that implementing agencies are carrying out and what funding is available for these activities. This tool aims to help identify and fill funding gaps.

Figure 10. Sample Emergency Actions Chart



Advocacy

Within OI, the Rights and Crisis Team has developed a pro-active campaign around rights as they relate to emergencies, particularly issues of protection and assistance. OI identified Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Afghanistan as the top three humanitarian emergencies that exemplify the need for rights-based advocacy on these issues. Any of the affiliates, including non-HC members, may be involved in the advocacy campaigns.

During an emergency, the advocacy staff of the Lead Agency at the country and headquarters' levels is engaged in advocacy efforts. Lead Agency staff works in close coordination with OI's advocacy and policy work.

Unique organizational aspects

Strengthening local preparedness – Oxfam focuses efforts on building local capacity as they recognize that the local responders are always the first responders. Many of their affiliates invest heavily in working with local organizations and government officials to prepare for emergencies.

Water and sanitation specialization – Oxfam has identified water and sanitation as a critical sector in which they want to be recognized as a leader. At the global level, Oxfam is actively engaged with the WASH Cluster and often is relied on to provide water and sanitation supplies and expertise during emergencies.

Policy and advocacy prioritization – Oxfam has intentionally linked its humanitarian response with a rights-based policy approach to advocate for change in the humanitarian sector. They state that Oxfam works to address the underlying causes of crisis and injustice, whether that is climate change, oppressive government policies, or other issues.

Alliance-wide learning and information platform – Oxfam created an interactive extranet, accessible by every affiliate and all OI staff, called Dashboard to improve communication across the organization. The Dashboard promotes collaboration and learning through hosting core information and tools to assist all staff in their work. The platform contains, among other things, a global directory and interactive team workspace to facilitate planning and coordination.

Save The Children Alliance

Global-level organization

Among the 27 members, the International Save the Children Alliance has seven members, Canada, Denmark, Italy, Norway, Sweden, UK, and US, which participate in the Emergency Liaison Team (ELT). The ELT is responsible for declaring and overseeing the coordination of Alliance-wide emergency responses and has a mandate for strategy, policy, and program development regarding emergency response. The ELT works with the Board of the International Save the Children Alliance and the Alliance Cooperation in Emergencies Unit (ACE).

Since 2007, ACE, which sits within the Secretariat, has been working to develop and maintain an emergency roster, set and mainstream standards, guidelines, and tools, and coordinate deployment of Alliance assets to support Lead Members. Additionally, recognizing that humanitarian emergencies are a part of children's lives around the world, ACE works to create an Alliance-wide emergency awareness and engagement – whether through integration of emergency preparedness, dedication of staff for the emergency roster, or fundraising for response efforts.

As a whole, Save the Children is currently moving toward consolidation and plans to have one unified physical presence in each country with an aim to simplify in-country coordination. The organization is currently in discussions on how, if at all, the global level may adjust to respond to greater unification at the country level.

Country-level structure

In approximately 100 countries, ELT has pre-assigned a Lead Member that would serve as an umbrella to all Save the Children operations within a country in the case of an emergency. This unified approach aims to achieve synergistic cooperation and effective coordination among Save the Children members, enable efficient use of resources, and build a stronger alliance. The unified, umbrella model is currently active in 12 countries, with 8 more planned by the end of the year.

Emergency response structure and procedures

When an emergency takes place, the ELT declares whether the situation warrants an Alliance-wide emergency response. The decision makers take in to account issues including: severity of emergency; number affected and unmet needs; local capacity; capacity of the country office; security and access; funding opportunities; media and political interests; and Save the Children's profile in the country. Depending on the level of alignment within the country a unified response or a coordinated response will begin, which are distinct in that a coordinated response allows for more than one operational member. Under a unified response, which is preferred, all Alliance support is channeled through a single Lead Member.

Within the country, the Lead Member has the responsibility for setting parameters, conducting an assessment, determining the level of the appeal across the Alliance, requesting personnel, organizing and allocating resources, and putting out and implementing a plan for response that is shared among all members. The day-to-day operational support for in-country operations comes from the Lead Member and their headquarters.

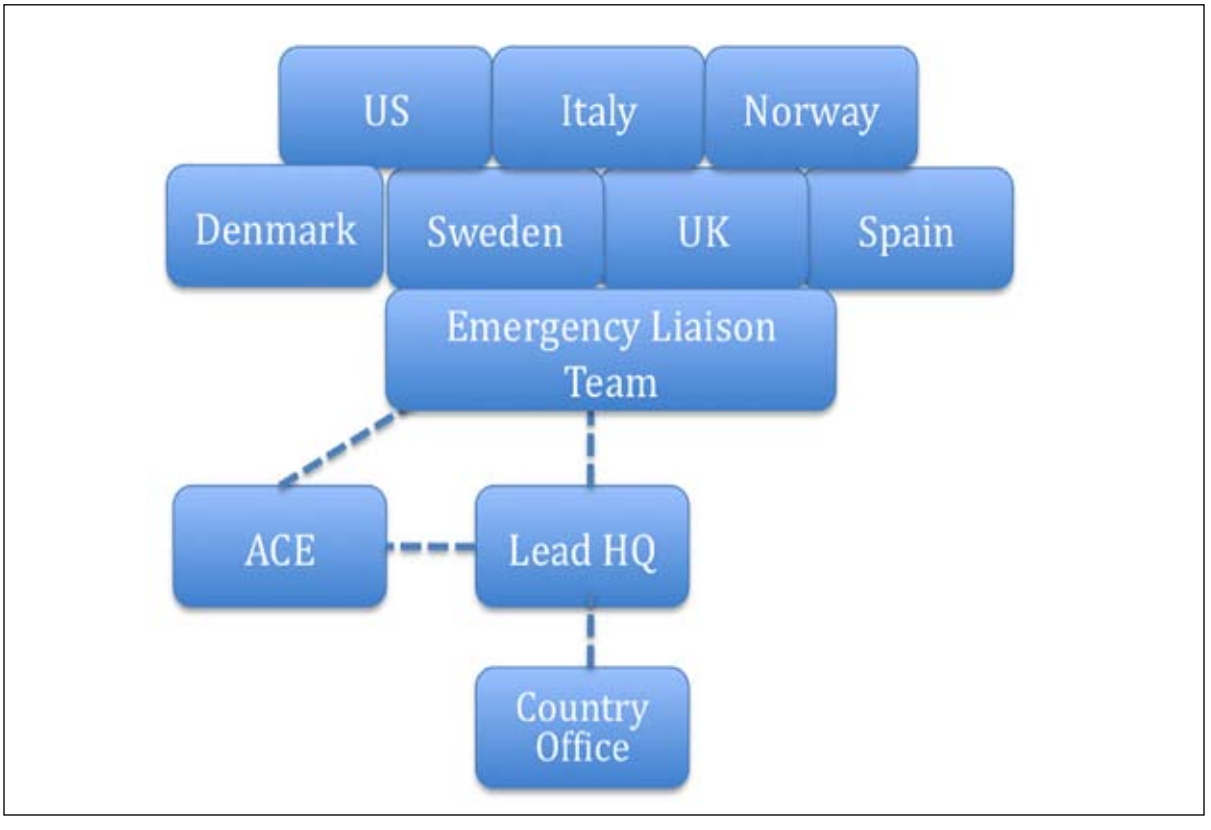
This year, ACE is instituting a global roster with approximately 100 emergency response specialists that are located throughout the 27 members of the Alliance to be deployed in support of Lead Members.

Resource allocation

The Lead Member is responsible for developing an appeal. All Alliance members participate in fundraising in support of the response. In most cases, all funds raised to support a unified emergency response are allocated to the Lead Member.

Figure 11. Sample Emergency Response Structure

At the international level, seven Save the Children affiliates comprise the Emergency Liaison Team (ELT). Also, the International Secretariat hosts Alliance Cooperation in Emergencies (ACE) to manage a global response roster and develop common humanitarian standards and engagement across the Alliance. The ELT has pre-assigned lead members that manage humanitarian response at the country level. The ELT and ACE support the Lead Member's headquarters to manage a response through the Country Office.



Advocacy

International advocacy is carried out by the Lead Member in coordination with a global-level advocacy working group. A working group is made up of individuals from the headquarters of members who are active in advocacy and/or participating in the response who define a set of messages that work more broadly in advocacy efforts by all members. The Lead Member provides an initial "Emergency Snapshot" and subsequent situation reports to the Secretariat for advocacy and communication efforts. The Secretariat is then responsible for forwarding advocacy information to Alliance members.

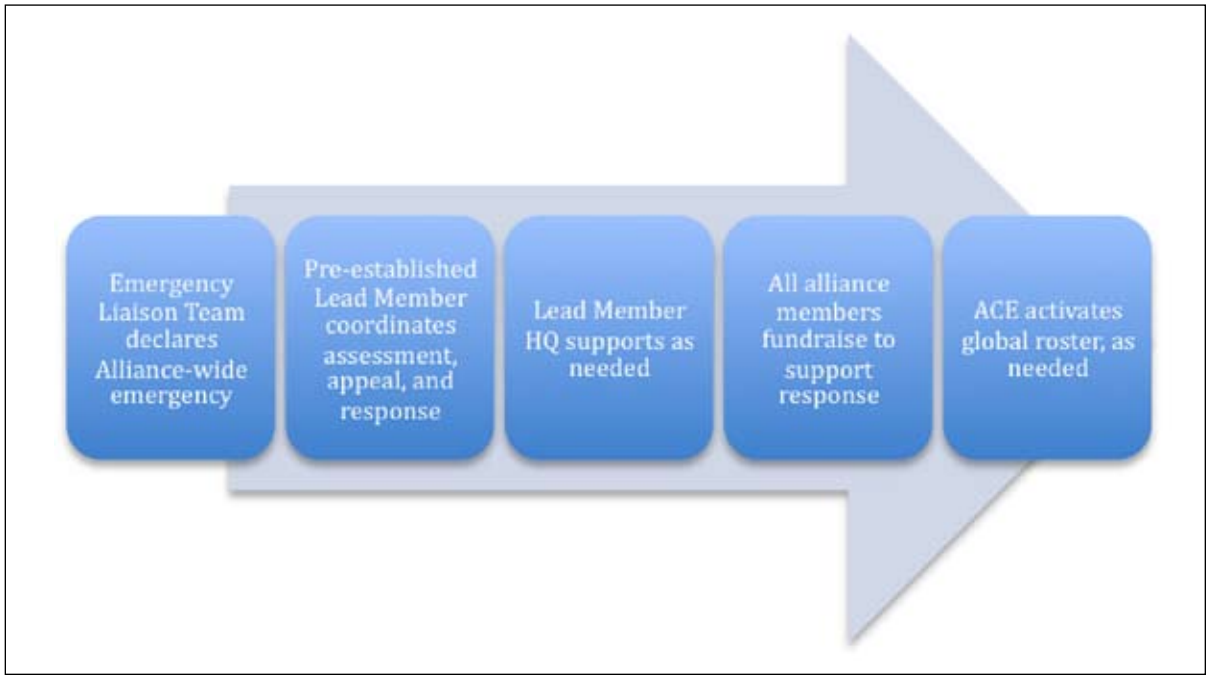
Unique organizational aspects

Unified presence – Save the Children has embarked on a major change in how they work in an effort to improve coordination and response at the country level. The organization reports that staff has welcomed the new, unified approach. There is wide organizational agreement that the new approach has been a more efficient and effective way of working.

Considering one global program delivery unit – Save the Children is exploring an option of creating a single global program delivery unit. In a major shift, this unit would provide a wide range of support activities for the Lead Member at the country level – including financial and administrative support that is currently provided by each Lead Member's headquarters. This shift, along with other options, is currently under discussion.

Engagement of non-response members in emergency work – the Alliance Cooperation in Emergencies unit is actively working to engage all members in Save the Children's emergency work. While seven members comprise the Emergency Liaison Team, there are efforts to build a humanitarian component into the work and orientation of all Alliance members. For example, the global roster is purposefully staffed with experts from members who are not in the Emergency Liaison Team.

Figure 12. Sample Emergency Actions Chart



World Vision International

Global-level organization

World Vision International is a Christian relief and development partnership with 65 national offices/branches that carryout a mixture of fundraising and programs. Within World Vision International, the Humanitarian Emergency Affairs (HEA) unit is the leader on humanitarian operations and issues.

Country-level structure

Multiple affiliates may be present in the same country, but typically operate through one World Vision National Office or Branch under the leadership of a national director. Programming, particularly in emergencies, is carried out jointly.

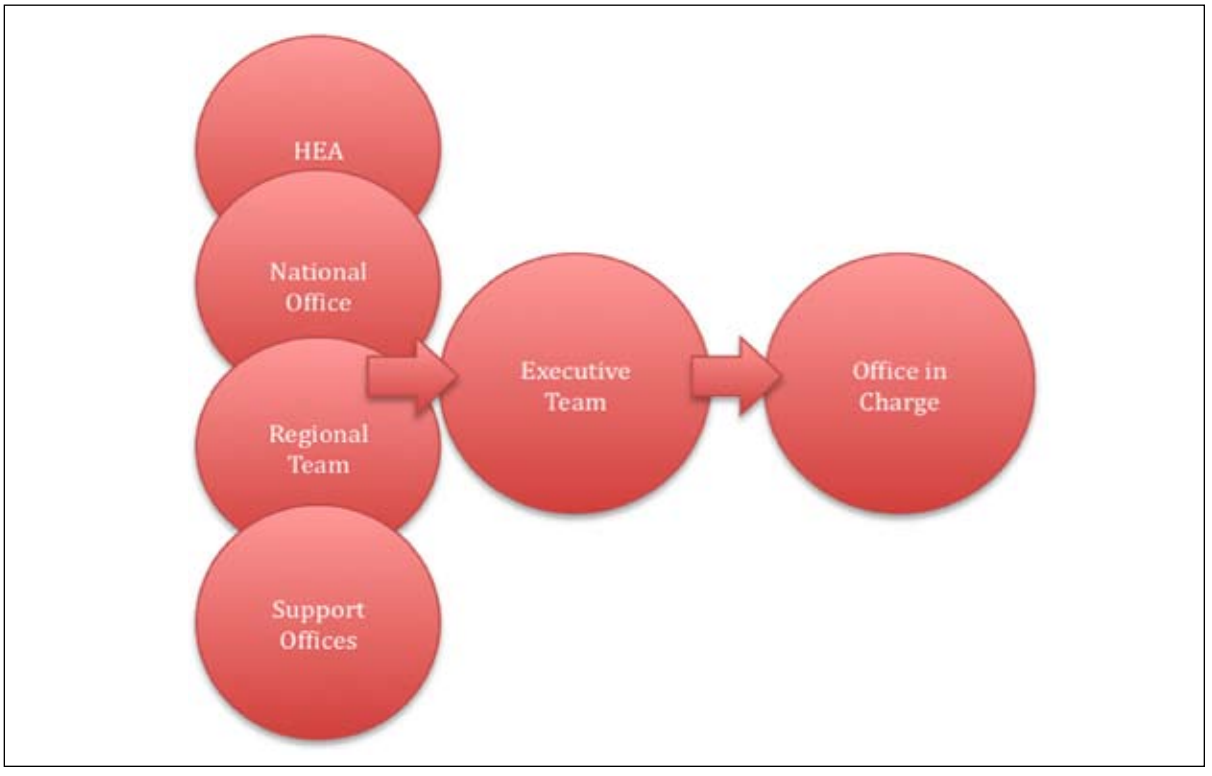
Emergency response governance

Emergencies are categorized based on the level of response needed (Category 1: national office response, Category 2: regional response, Category 3: global response). Responses follow Emergency Standards that were developed in 2000 and are supplemented with agreed upon World Vision Operational Imperatives and a multi-tiered rapid response structure. When an emergency takes place, the WV leadership at the regional level consults with, as needed, the HEA director at WVI to determine the level of the emergency and which resources of the partnership to mobilize. In the case of a Category 3 emergency, the president of WVI is also included in the decision-making process and all the resources of the world-wide federation are made available for response. In a Category 2 emergency, resources may be mobilized partnership-wide as needed. During a Category 1 emergency, all affiliates within the country are involved in some capacity with the response.

In regional and global emergencies, an executive team is established to make key decisions about leadership and structure. This team often will meet multiple times a day during

Figure 13. Sample Emergency Response Structure

The Humanitarian Emergency Affairs (HEA) unit and the leadership at the regional level assess the emergency situation and establish an Executive Team. With the support of HEA, the national office, the regional team, and support offices, the Executive Team determines how the response will be carried out and who will lead response activities. The Office in Charge may be the existing National Office or a separate office may be established.



the beginning of a response. The executive team is comprised of the national, regional, and as appropriate, global humanitarian leadership and often has representatives from the largest WV affiliates such as Australia, US, or Canada. The executive team determines who will lead the response and how it will be structured. For example, will it be the national office, regional office, or an outside manager? Or, will it be integrated in to the national office or will the response office be a separate structure? In most operations, a small core team of external WV staff will work with the national office to get a response operation off the ground until local staff is hired or staff is seconded from other national offices.

World Vision has cascading levels of emergency response surge capacity. A global rapid response team consists of approximately 30 full-time staff and additional on-call associates with specialized skills from the national offices. Members from this team can be deployed within 72 hours of an emergency and stay on-site for up to three months. Regional rapid response teams have been developed and are staffed by the 65 national offices. All participants are certified to have certain skills that are necessary in emergency response activities and serve as the second tier of response in emergencies. WVI hosts annual training events and a mentoring process to develop emergency response skills and attempts to bring everyone to a common level of capacity.

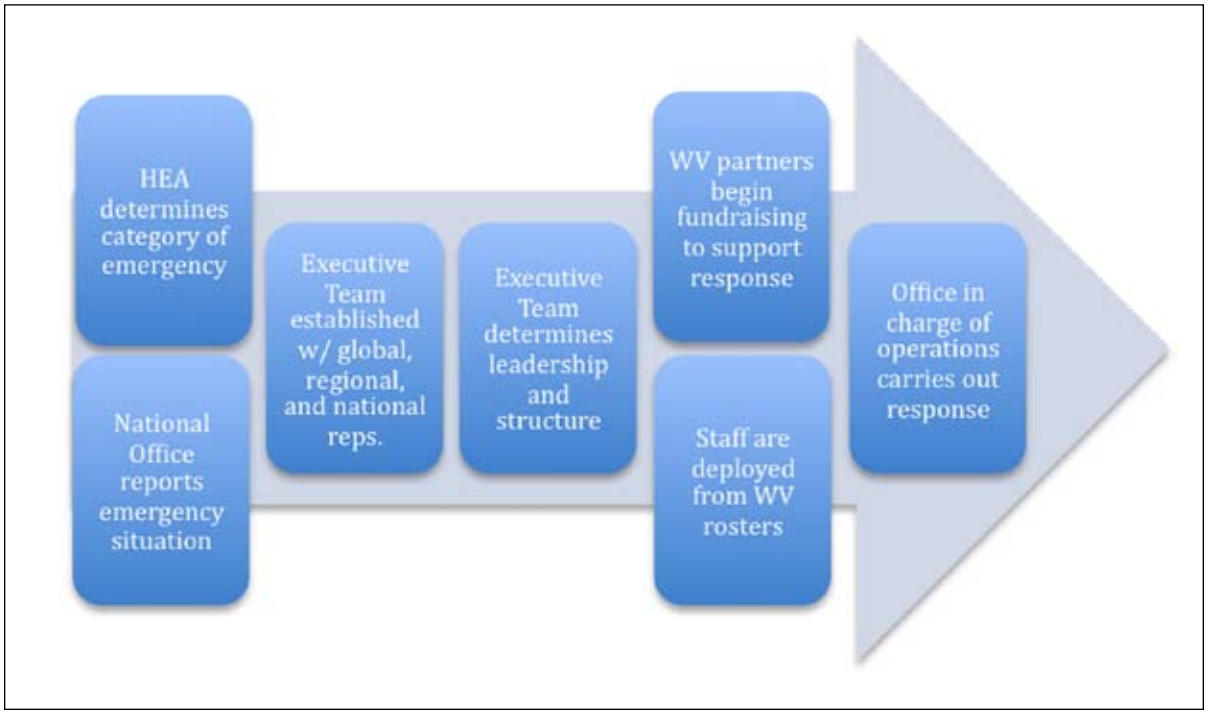
WVI reports that the policies and structures that have been in place since 2000 have provided, at the minimum, a 10 to 1 return on investment in terms of the funding that was generated as a result of the rapid response staff and structure being mobilized during major emergencies. They also report that the current way of organizing has improved their ability to deploy and implement more quickly than in the past.

Resource allocation

All WV partners are involved in fundraising for humanitarian operations. Involvement will depend on the level of interest and level of ability to raise funds for the crisis. Particularly in high-profile emergencies, most partners are active in fundraising efforts. All funding for emergencies that is generated in WV offices is channeled through WVI and then back out to support programming. In some cases, WV offices will have the opportunity to specify which portion of the humanitarian operations to fund.

WVI runs an Emergency Preparedness Response Fund, with a residual of approximately US$ 6 million to utilize during an emergency.

Figure 14. Sample Emergency Actions Chart



Advocacy

WVI has a global advocacy team and each region has an advocacy focal point. Additionally, certain national offices have an advocacy officer to work on relevant issues and coordinate with the regional/global team.

In emergencies, the global advocacy team leads the development of advocacy messages and media outreach in general. The national and regional advocacy officers provide information that helps to shape the global messages.

Unique organizational aspects

Sectoral specialization – affiliates become experts in different sectors. For example, WV Canada has focused on nutrition and has invested in developing skills and expertise in this area. They are then able to service the entire partnership on nutrition issues, including sending staff for emergency response. Similarly, WV Australia has developed technical capacity around disaster risk reduction.

Hot Country Issue Sessions – WVI holds global and regional forums with affiliates every year. One aspect of these events is the opportunity to bring in national directors or operations directors of countries affected by humanitarian emergencies to discuss key issues and the support that the broader WV partnership is able to provide.

Global emergency stockpile – WVI has put in place a global-level stockpile, including emergency communication technology and water and sanitation supplies. They have begun discussions with other NGOs to coordinate around a global pre-positioning resource network.

Amnesty International

Global-level organization

Amnesty International (AI) is a movement with 70 sections (similar to a national office) that operate as fairly independent national entities. All sections follow a common mission, vision, and values statement. There is a movement-wide six-year integrated strategic plan that frames the work of AI at the international and country levels.

An International Secretariat supports the national sections and is AI's global center for research, campaigning, legal, lobbying, and membership work. The Secretariat serves as the national office for countries in which there is not a physical presence to monitor and respond to human rights issues.

Each section has voting rights, depending on their size, in the International Council where all movement-wide decisions are made. In between International Council meetings, the International Executive Committee, also the board of the Secretariat, is responsible for carrying out the decisions and strategy of the International Council and governing the international movement.

Country-level structure

Within any given country, only one section will be present. National sections are independent and structured differently depending on the context and local needs – some will have one staff member and others may have up to 300. All national sections have their own volunteer board. National sections develop organically and often an office will be started by a group of volunteers who are working on human rights issues within a country. There are a series of steps that are required to eventually become an official Amnesty office, including adhering to financial and governance guidelines.

Within a country, most sections are guided by a strategic or at least operational plan that establishes global priorities and campaign issues. A national office is able to take what is happening in the global movement and adapt it to their country's needs.

Each national section has a section director who, along with national board members, represents their entity at the global level and interacts with the Secretariat.

Emergency response structure and procedures

In the case of a human rights emergency in a country without an Amnesty presence, a team is established within the International Secretariat. The team may operate virtually and may also contain members from other national sections. If appropriate, members from the team may travel to the country of concern for a short period of time.

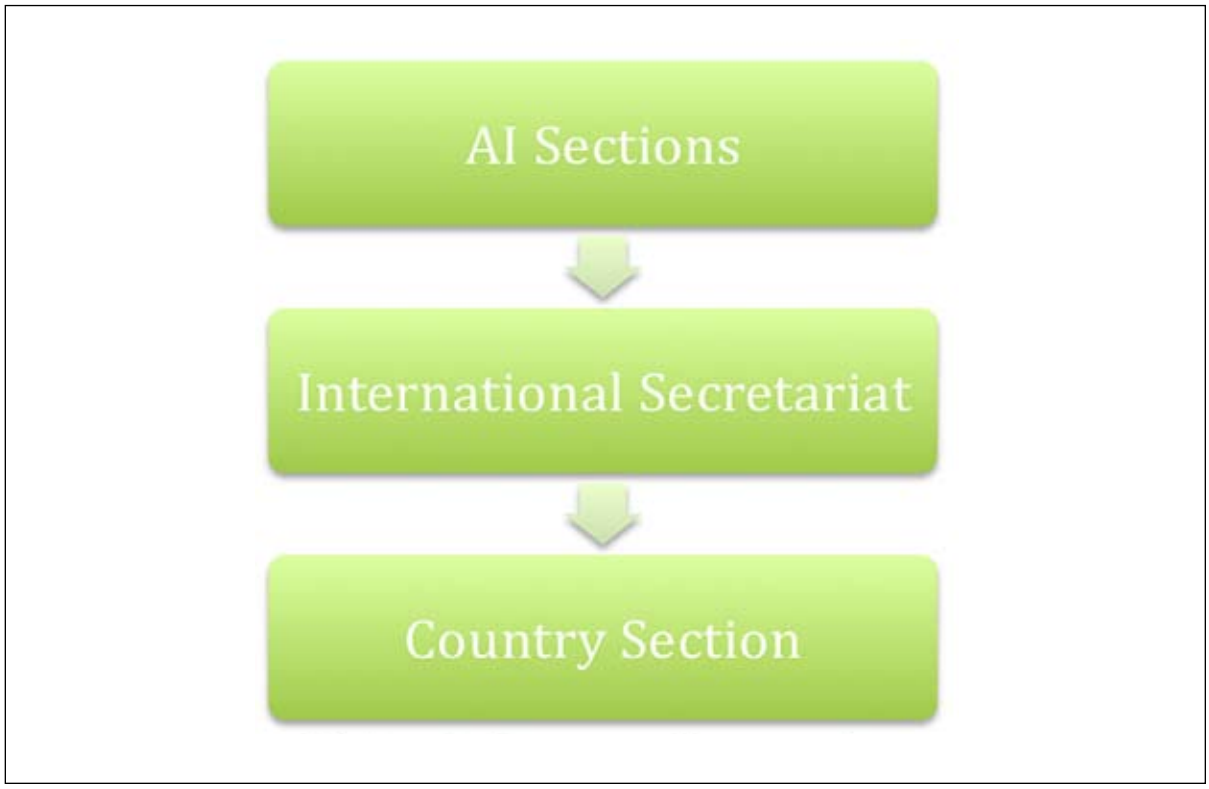
If there is already a national section, it may support AI's response in a time of crisis, depending on their size, skills, and competencies. Researchers or other staff from the Secretariat may visit in order to support the section and gather information to generate movement-wide advocacy.

Resource allocation

Amnesty International generates resources through its membership in each country. The national section determines the membership fees and income structure that is most appropriate for the section's context. The amount of income generated determines the level of financial support given to the Secretariat and impacts the number of votes a section is allocated in the International Council.

Un-planned expenses, including emergency work, may require that the Secretariat request additional support from the movement. While there is no set policy, typically the Secretary-General would make the request for additional support. National sections put forward staff or resources within their capacity, but are not obligated to do so.

Figure 15. Sample Emergency Response Structure
Under the strategy of the International Council (comprised of representatives of country sections), a team is established at the Secretariat. Where a national section exists, this office may support AI's response.



Advocacy

AI is an advocacy movement and most of their work centers on shared international campaigns. Section staff and volunteers adapt global messages for relevance in their country and can develop local campaigns and activities.

During a crisis, the national section and/or an international team will determine advocacy messages to be carried out by the movement.

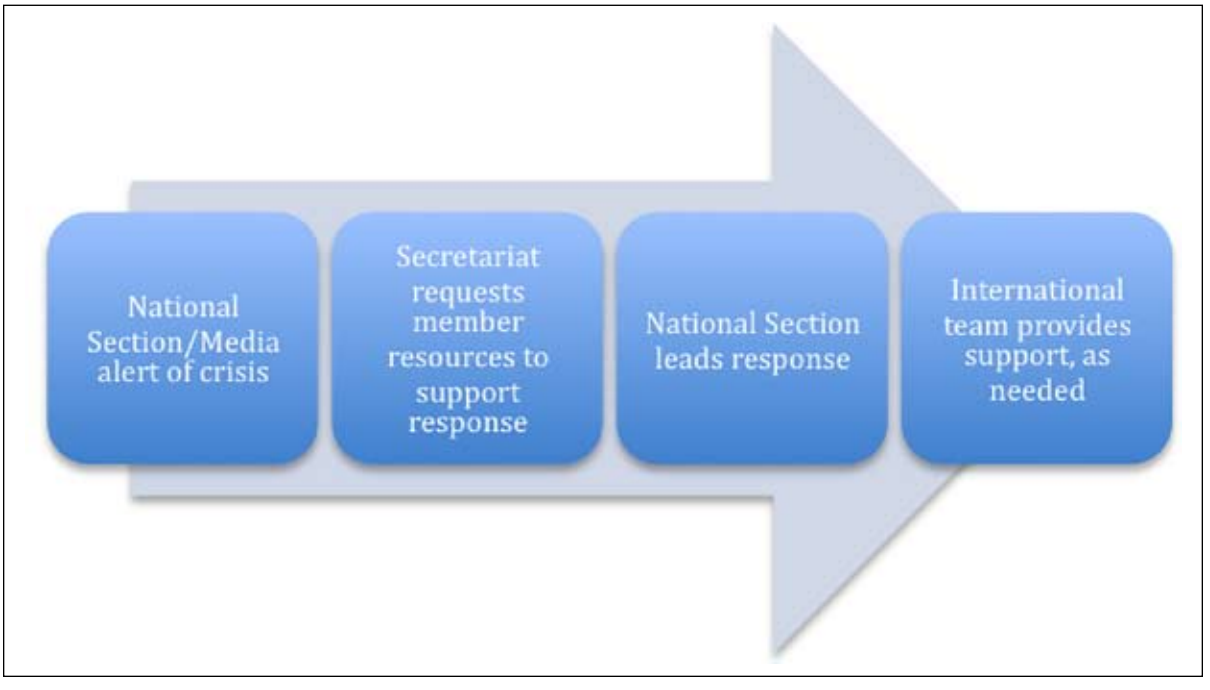
Unique organizational aspects

Focus on advocacy – AI does not explicitly deliver "services" or resources. The organization is designed to focus on carrying out international advocacy campaigns. Therefore, they have invested more in understanding how information can be shared within the movement, rather than movement of resources or staff.

Diversity of national entities – While all sections technically work under the same integrated strategic plan, their configuration and approach can vary greatly. An office doing advocacy work and fundraising in the United States would need a significantly different structure than an office attempting to do advocacy work in Sierra Leone, for example. The diversity of offices is the result of the different stages of organizational development that each office is at and the organic way in which the offices have been formed.

National members shape global campaign – the structure and governance of AI put the decision-making power in the hands of the national representatives. All levels of action, from development to implementation, are led by and adapted by national and international volunteers as a democratic organization.

Figure 16. Sample Emergency Actions Chart



KEY FINDINGS

When putting together learning from the literature review and from the organizational reviews, there are a number of themes that emerge as common issues. NGOs that aim to function with a multi-member system will benefit from dedicating time and resources to better understand how these issues are relevant in their own context. The key issues include:

- having the right people, at the right time, in the right place;
- knowing who you are and what you do;
- executing the strategy;
- being ready to respond;
- managing intra-organizational tensions; and,
- using transparency as an aid to action.

While this report does not aim to identify a best structure or a right way of working, these issues highlight areas that require attention and deserve exploration in federated organizations.

Having the Right People, at the Right Time, in the Right Place

> ***"Basically, it is having the people, things, and money available to implement at any time. The difficult part is how to get it mobilized in a federated system."***

Our interviews made it clear that no matter the structures and systems, in the end, a good response comes down to the people. There are unique challenges for this within a federated system. Across all levels of interaction, individuals' personalities, capacities, and preparedness combine to influence how a response is carried out and if it is carried out smoothly. Whether describing the international or the national level, this was the most commonly cited criteria for success.

Firstly, having the right people, at the right time, in the right place is about investing in people to develop the most needed skills to carry out the organization's mission. All organizations we interviewed highlighted the need for training processes in the field and at headquarters. A number of people cited the challenges of high turnover and rapidly changing contexts – how do you train so many people and what do you train them to do?

> *"One of the biggest challenges in this process of multi-levels of capacity is that the certification means that all people are at a certain level, that there is a common measuring stick. One person might say this person is good enough and another person disagrees. We are still doing some work to build that up and make the measuring stick common across the board."*

Organizations named a range of hard and soft skills that are critical among staff, including management and communication skills and specific sector skills such as water and sanitation. Developing a staff who has a mixture of hard and soft skills was a priority among all the organizations we interviewed. However, as one interviewee noted, it is not just about training on the right issues, it is as much about hiring good people who fit with the organizational culture and share the organizational vision, which takes extra care in a diverse, multi-member organization.

Each organization struggled with creating common standards of capacity across a federated system. One affiliate may have specific expertise in one sector, but is lacking capacity in another. One affiliate may have a smaller training budget and fewer resources to invest in staff development. One affiliate may have significantly higher expectations and standards than another. Often, it was noted, a critical role of the international secretariat is to establish a common level of standards across the organization and facilitate ensuring that every affiliate meets these standards on a consistent basis.

Also critical is the degree of commonality between federation members over approaches to work. In any one federation some members may favor working via local community based groups, another may favor direct action. One may be inclined to work with local government ministries, another to maintain a distance. If these operational preferences are not clearly shared and discussed ahead of operational cooperation, it can

lead to tensions that have, in the past, flared into major organizational issues.

Beyond having the right people, organizations are challenged by the ability to have their people available and the systems to deploy rapidly. As one organization said, "We are not using the staff effectively, having them available when we need them. It is a matter of having the right skills, but also systems that allow us to deploy them." It is not enough to have well-trained staff if they are not available when their skills are most needed.

> *"In a complex humanitarian emergency, there are so many different sectors, so to be able to get enough expertise in all the different areas is a difficult challenge. For instance, one of the areas we are struggling with finding resources and interest level in is education in emergencies – it has been tough to find the resources and interest level in different locations."*

One difference among the organizations was how they allocated skills, people, resources, and decision making among the national, regional, and international levels. While one organization may be building up their global capacity to backstop emergency response operations, others are focusing on building up the response capacity of the national office. There was less clarity among the organizations on the role of the regional level – while most have regionally-based staff, only one organization explicitly stated the role of the regional team in humanitarian response.

The most common system by which organizations aim to have staff available and deployable is through a global or regional roster system. The rosters vary in scale and structure. All involve some level of training, but typically do not require a certification process. While one of the organizations we interviewed has up to 30 full-time staff members on an active roster, others have no full-time staff and are based entirely on seconding staff from other national offices in times of emergency. While the roster system is common, using it effectively is still a challenge, as one organization described, "Mobilizing adequate capacity in a rapid fashion to an emergency response is one of our biggest pain points."

A GLOBAL LEARNING EXCHANGE PROGRAM

In order to facilitate creating a community of practice across members, CARE established a global learning exchange program. Once a month, CARE staff members are invited to participate in a global conference call or web presentation. Staff members are asked to sign up ahead of time and typically there are approximately 15-20 participants. Country offices and the CARE Emergency Group chose the issues for discussion and a translation service is used so that all who wish to participate are able. The idea is to create the opportunity for cross-organizational learning. For example, a country response team coordinator from Latin America who does not speak French or English would have the opportunity to connect with someone in a similar role in West Africa.

Knowing Who You Are and What You Do

> ***"We looked at where we were when we started, where we are, and where we are going."***

With the rapid growth in size and resources of the humanitarian community, a number of NGOs are taking the time to determine what does or could make them unique among all the actors and how to go about developing this identity. Establishing a unified mission, objectives, and a brand for humanitarian action can be a challenging process in large, complex, and diverse organizations.

> *"We are building on our past and we haven't even really looked at what others are doing, what the learning in the sector is—it is happening very quickly without a lot of thought and analysis going in to it."*

Organizations are working to identify their own strengths and invest in developing these areas further across affiliates. Two of the organizations that we interviewed described niche areas that they aimed to establish as priority sectors. Their goal is to be recognized as leaders among the humanitarian community in those particular areas, such as water and sanitation or shelter. Other organizations raised cross-cutting issues or ways of working that they felt set them apart from others, such as high levels of accountability or advanced systems for evaluation.

> *"You have to remain driven by the local needs. You have got to be close enough to the local reality and to be independent enough to be able to respond to that and know the local needs. You want international coordination, and some stuff to be centralized, but there is great benefit in being closely related enough to what is happening on the ground. It is a delicate balance, and I think that is why all organizations are struggling with it. How do you remain locally relevant and still be globally effective?"*

These priorities work best when the process to identify and implement a common identity and goals is driven by people from throughout the organization—both from the national and international levels. All of the NGOs in this study have international boards that have country-level representation to help guide organization-wide decision making and priority setting. Many of the strategic planning processes highlighted by the agencies included participation of field-level staff, but rarely was a process mentioned that was field led or country-level driven, and only once was it mentioned that beneficiaries were involved.

FIVE-YEAR PLANNING CYCLE

Oxfam established their Humanitarian Consortium (HC) five years ago to strengthen coordination among affiliates and improve humanitarian response and action. The group developed objectives and a plan to guide their work together. They are now embarking on a new planning process identifying where the HC would like to be in five more years. They are creating a new baseline of each affiliates' investment and capacity. The HC has determined eleven categories and where they aim to be in each of these categories in five years.

"In Rwanda after the genocide we had a number of affiliates come and set up shop, with programs that were not necessarily reflective of our overall mission. They were mainly about the donors' interests and that specific affiliates' interests. We had a number of problems with that approach and that crisis led us to decide that we needed a more coordinated effort in times of crisis."

Once a common identity and shared priorities are established, another challenge is maintaining the flexibility to adjust given changing contexts and realities. Adaptive organizational policies and structures are often discussed, but few organizations have made significant changes to enable more flexible ways of working. Flexibility will be discussed further below, but as Lindenberg and Bryant mentioned in their work, a number of organizations have attempted to gain flexibility through decentralization, only to re-centralize to facilitate quality control and organizational cohesion.

"There are so many differences among the units that we cannot have a complete organization-wide picture or know exactly where its resources are going or what impact we are having. We want to align a bit more so we can do things like measure impact more easily. For example, all our national offices can have different financial year-ends, so creating a picture of the organization-wide situation is challenging and complex."

It is challenging to balance the needs of flexibility and adaptability with the organizational needs for common mission and coordinated strategy. One way agencies have attempted this balance is through integrated planning and preparedness processes. If done well, these processes provide a framework for future action while allowing the space for maneuvering to address local needs or new realities. Having an organization-wide understanding of shared values and goals, coupled with integrated strategic plans can help to maintain a sense of common purpose and identity within a complex organization during an emergency response. And, when the staff feels they are part of a unified organizational mission, it can serve as an effective guide for difficult decision-making and action during emergencies.

Executing the Strategy

"After spending some time in the field, I came home very concerned. We work at the global level and interact with the UN, other NGOs, governments, etc. and the reality is that we develop a sophisticated level of standards, policies, and structures. And, then the biggest challenge is that there is a disconnect with what is happening at the field level. That is something that we continue to struggle with. I think a lot of it is that we don't disseminate and mainstream things well. There needs to be more resources and effort that goes in to that."

Executing the organizational strategy requires leadership, flexibility, and partners on the ground. Particularly when working in fast-paced, complex situations, a strategy and plan is only as good as the action that it guides.

"If you have a pragmatic, confident leader, they understand and say, 'we delegate that responsibility to you. We just want to make sure that you keep coordinating with us so that we know what is going on and are not going to be surprised later on.' And, that to me, is the best leader, the one who is confident and pragmatic and says 'I want the best people to do what you need to do and just keep me informed and keep it coordinated with us so we know what is going on.'

Having capable leaders to put policies into action is an essential component of humanitarian response. NGO staff interviewed stressed the need for leadership across the organization. One interviewee put it well, saying "We have issues around leadership everywhere – the high-level leadership throughout the organization. We need good leaders, who are willing and able to follow the standards and operational imperatives and make the difficult decisions to make us effective." The organizations described leadership in emergencies in different ways – some stressed the need for transparency and openness, others thought it was most important that country-level leadership was accepting of external support, and another

organization allocated full decision-making authority to the country-level leadership. Regardless of the role of leadership within their particular structure, it is clear that developing leaders is an essential part of creating a healthy, well-functioning organization.

Beyond good leadership, executing the strategy also involves having the flexibility to adapt plans and operations so that they are as relevant and effective as possible. While a shared organizational strategy guides all the distinct parts of an organization in a common direction, it will be ineffective and could actually hinder action if the strategy is not flexible enough for application by staff in the field. While all the organizations interviewed had a global strategy, most mentioned the need for adaptation at the country-level to ensure relevance and effectiveness. In order for a strategy to be adapted in the field, country-level leadership must feel empowered and supported to make decisions and adjust plans as they see fit.

"In emergencies, it is not always as easy to identify local partners with a sufficient capacity to play a large role in emergency response."

Discussion on implementation and execution would be incomplete without highlighting the role of local partnerships. Organization's relationships with and reliance on local partnerships varies between organizations and within multi-member organizations. One affiliate may work exclusively through local organizations and another affiliate may only carry out direct service delivery. Both of these affiliates could have the same end goal, but differ on the means and approach. Previous FIC research has found that during times of crisis, relationships that have been built with local partners, particularly around longer-term development activities, can shift to resemble a more contract-based implementer rather than an equal partnership approach. Also, some NGOs included in this project noted that in many cases they did not think that there were NGOs operating at the scale that was typically necessary for their major response operations, so it was difficult to continue working with as many partners during an emergency.

EXECUTIVE SUPPORT TEAM

World Vision created the Executive Support Team to provide additional guidance and support to country offices during an emergency. On occasion, an individual is deployed during an emergency to work along side the country office director. In the past, it has been helpful to ease the transition to working in "emergency mode" and to build a stronger relationship between the country-level leadership and the international-level leadership. Typically, the staff person who is deployed would be a senior manager with many years of emergency response experience and is well known and trusted throughout the organization. This individual would work closely with the national director and often serves in an advisory role for a short period of time to get a response going in the beginning of an emergency.

Being Ready to Respond

> ***"We have noticed that there have been a lot of contingency plans developed focused a lot on scenarios and other things, but haven't really touched on the management of who is going to be doing what"***

Each NGO that we interviewed could list all of the plans that their organization uses – strategic plans, work plans, action plans, contingency plans, joint country plans, regional plans, business continuity plans, etc. – yet, there was still discussion of the many ways in which they were not prepared or not coordinated in response. One theme that emerged from the organizations was that response plans work well when the roles and responsibilities of each part of the federated structure were well understood prior to an emergency taking place. If it was clear what the roles of the international secretariat, the regional office, and the country-level team were, then good decision making, rapid action, and accountable results were much easier to achieve.

> *"As we have implemented a much more clear structure and mechanisms around how it works, and people understand that, and it is used over and over again, it is starting to get to be normal practice."*

If practice does not make perfect, it does go a long way. New ways of working (both structures and systems) take time to operationalize and become familiar with. The more times they are used, the policies and mechanisms will be refined and improved. While many of the organizations reported high staff turnover as a critical issue, having staff who are familiar with the procedures and have experience in the organization's ways of working will facilitate a more efficient and effective emergency response.

A UNIFIED RESPONSE TO CYCLONE NARGIS

In 2007, Save the Children rolled out a unified country strategy in Myanmar. This brought together all of the existing individual affiliates (Save the Children US, UK, and Japan) to work under one umbrella structure. Save the Children UK was appointed the managing member to provide leadership for all member activities within Myanmar. Less than a year later, Cyclone Nargis, described as the worst cyclone in the country's recorded history, triggered a major humanitarian crisis and caused approximately US$ 10 billion in damages. Because the structure and systems were already in place and staff had experienced a cohesive way of working, the unified country presence was able to respond quickly and in a coordinated manner. As the managing member, Save the Children UK was responsible for setting the parameters, determining the level of the appeal across the alliance, requesting personnel and resources, and putting out a plan for the response that was shared with all members.

"Response works best when you have a situation where you have a unified structure. It works best where you have done the most organizational preparedness for disasters."

If practice does not make perfect, it does go a long way. New ways of working (both structures and systems) take time to operationalize and become familiar with. The more times they are used, the policies and mechanisms will be refined and improved. While many of the organizations reported high staff turnover as a critical issue, having staff who are familiar with the procedures and have experience in the organization's ways of working will facilitate a more efficient and effective emergency response.

"We still have a significant amount of work to do to ensure that our policies are carried out consistently across the board, and that our staff are competent enough."

Each organization has developed unique tools to facilitate being ready for emergency response. The best tools are ones, as an interviewee put it, "that help people do their job easier or even better." If staff finds a tool useful and relevant, they will not only accept it, they will request it. Too often tools can be viewed in the field as extra work to learn and use, but if it is an effective tool, then organizations reported that more and more country offices will ask for the tool or further training on maximizing its use.

Managing Intra-Organizational Tensions

"We have found that it is easiest to mount an operation in a country that does not have a national office, because it does away with that level of static. The reality is that people tend to take close ownership of something and then an external team comes in and swallows up or takes over the profile of what you have been working on for twenty years and things all change. It is a difficult process. At the same time, it is essential to recognize that in emergency response a different set of parameters need to be paid attention to than in on-going national office programs. And, the reality is that it has to change and has to change quickly"

While there are many advantages to multi-member organizations, there are a number of constraints that the NGOs in this study highlighted. The range of actors, objectives, contexts, historical influences, and resources, among other issues, often create tension when working together, particularly in a stressful operation such as an emergency response.

"Where the model is based on having supposedly autonomous agencies at the local level, then the relationship with the international emergency delivery structure can be complicated."

One tension that the organizations raised was balancing international and national pressures when determining if and how to respond during an emergency. A country-level office, for example, may have pressures from donors, beneficiaries, partners, or the government regarding a response. For example, a government may be concerned that an international relief effort would influence perceptions of the nation's level of development and discourage public action, while at the same time the international secretariat may face pressure for their organization to "do something" from other affiliates who are raising money to respond.

"There are examples where the head of the organization has stepped in to a country team and said, 'You will respond now.'

In addition to balancing national and international interests, organizations also must manage interaction among diverse affiliates. Within the same organization, affiliates may have distinct methods of carrying out humanitarian response (for example, working through local partners or direct service delivery), different perceptions of the scope of humanitarian work (for example, aid delivery or advocacy and rights promotion), or divergent policies on financing (for example, whether or not to accept government funding). During a response, trying to coordinate while managing differences has transaction costs. Even when decisions are made and consensus is built before an emergency, there are still countless times during a response when affiliates might differ in opinion, analysis, or approach. Taking the time to work through these issues, while essential, is costly in time and energy.

"Everybody's perspective is different. Coming from 18-20 different funding entities and then trying to divide up the pie and make sure everyone is happy really depends on excellent negotiating skills and diplomacy with the different supporting entities as well as with the people who are doing the budgeting and funding allocation process."

It is also important to highlight the traditional divide that many organizations reported between their development staff and humanitarian staff. Development and humanitarian efforts, while complementary, have often been structured as separate entities within an organization and can clash when trying to work in the same context. This can be exacerbated in a federated organization where different affiliates may be more development or humanitarian oriented. It is interesting to note that within most of the organizations in this study, coordination and cohesion around humanitarian efforts, as opposed to development activities, was one of the first ways in which different affiliates came together to align their work.

"Often clashes will happen when they are getting incredible pressure from the different supporting entities around the world that can raise money who say 'we are not doing enough, we aren't addressing what is out there that we can raise money for.' There can be a case where money is already coming in, and we may not even be there yet."

There are times when the entity responsible for action, for any number of reasons, is not capable of leading an adequate emergency response. Two of the organizations we interviewed explicitly mentioned their organization's step-aside policy that establishes when and how leadership could be transitioned to a different affiliate during an emergency. This is one approach that organizations have taken to pro-actively manage and acknowledge the different capacities among affiliates. One of the organizations with a step-aside policy reported that it has had each of their participating humanitarian response affiliates be asked to step-aside at some point since the policy was put in place.

"We often have the challenge… where the national leadership or the regional leadership will be reluctant to allow outside engagement or will be preferential and not impartial about it."

From studies that the Feinstein International Center has conducted in the past two years, we have also witnessed how internal affiliate rivalries and pressures can deeply effect operations. In at least two federations rivalry for which donor affiliate will be designated as the leading or controlling entity in an operational country has led to bitter disputes and to a sense that the affiliate is choosing programming as much to position itself in its federation, as to meet proven needs. In a recent major humanitarian operation, we found that it was pressure from affiliate members, not donors, which caused the operational affiliate on the ground to program and spend faster than it thought prudent, with significant negative consequences for the beneficiary populations. These pressures, rivalries, and differences need to be managed. They are a noisy consequence of operating federally and thus need a federal response to address them.

"When we first began to coordinate around work, there were no other aspects of the organization's work that was coordinated. We found a way to get pragmatism to guide us towards working together in one particular area of work well ahead of the rest of the organization coming around to think that it was necessary for anything else to."

Managing differences within a federated organization can lead to opportunities for synergy. One of our interviewees described a meaningful experience of working with staff from numerous affiliates in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami, saying "We had people from Zimbabwe, Kenya, West Africa, Thailand, India, US, Canada, and Latin America – it is one of the more stimulating elements – when you bring diverse people from different places with diverse skills who are willing to work together." While these various humanitarian workers surely had to deal with transaction costs from different ways of operating, he stressed that the experience was a positive one as each brought different strengths and perspectives but were committed to common organizational objectives.

"Sometimes we know that there is not enough capacity at the country level. So, we have to say t o a country that because of the risk management policies – being able to respond in an effective and accountable way – some programs may be taken over."

PRESSURE TO RESPOND

In describing intra-organizational dynamics, one organization we interviewed told us the following story: after a powerful earthquake struck in Turkey, the Middle East regional director called the international-level humanitarian office to discuss the organization's response as there was not a country-level office in Turkey. The regional director noted the level of development in Turkey and the ability of the national government to respond to the disaster, and advised that their NGO did not implement response activities. After reviewing the situation and taking in to account the recommendations of the regional office, the international secretariat decided that no organizational response would be necessary. Nearly immediately after informing the regional office of the decision, the secretariat received a phone call from the U.S. member asking what the organization would be doing as they had already raised US$ 300,000 for response efforts. In the end, the organization developed partnerships with other organizations and used the funding to support relief efforts of these partners.

Using Transparency as An Aid To Action

> ***"Being in a partnership and consortium, a lot of our work is trust driven so there is a certain level of ambiguity and some flexibility because we operate on trust."***

Transparency, and in turn trust, make federations function. In most of the organizations we interviewed, there are very few ways to actually force an affiliate or the international secretariat to do anything. Consensus, compromise, complementarity, and coordination are the standard ways of operating. As previous FIC research indicated, working in a federation is about relationships, which are built on trust and transparency.

> *"One thing is working in a federated structure, it is not easy – you have to communicate, communicate, communicate."*

The NGOs interviewed stressed the importance of communication among all levels and at all stages. Communication and sharing of information was particularly highlighted as essential during a crisis or when establishing new ways of working within the organization. A number of organizations stressed the major challenge that exists when there is a lack of transparency and communication or a poor relationship between the national-level leadership and the international leadership. This can be one of the greatest obstacles to an effective response. Also, within an organization, the interviewees stressed the need to create a sense of openness and transparency between the affiliates that participate in humanitarian response and the affiliates that focus on fundraising and/or advocacy.

> *"Appointing leadership can be dicey, however we have found that the most successful is when the national office director is very open and very willing to take outside leadership and delegates that process. Where there is hesitancy and, there is more often issues and problems."*

A number of the participating NGOs have invested in creating tools to facilitate information sharing and transparency. The ability to manage and share information in an emergency was viewed as one of the most critical components of a successful response. Having a manner in which to organize and disseminate information will not only support transparency efforts, it also enables a more rapid and effective response.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE DATABASE

In an effort to improve information management in emergencies and to avoid overwhelming the office in charge of operations, WVI established a database where all documents and strategies are posted during an emergency. All World Vision affiliates have access to this database and can use the information posted to inform their activities, typically around communications or marketing. The database also contains all relevant project documents, so it is useful for staff working on the ground during an emergency response. The database was designed as a tool to assist response while decreasing the pressure on staff to provide information to multiple partners and has been viewed as relevant and highly useful.

CONCLUSION

We have examined of some of the largest and most well-known NGOs with an aim to understand the ways in which multi-member organizations approach emergency response. We are acutely aware that this study is based mostly on interviews with senior NGO staff at the headquarters level. It was not within the scope of this study to systematically talk with field staff charged with implementing the new operational structured which are now evolving and, thus, it was not possible to ground-truth the conclusions of this study in the field.

That said, the research set out to identify aspects of the organizations that were unique but also more or less common and relevant to others in the humanitarian system. Building on organizational theory, we explored aspects of each organizations' structures and processes and the challenges that each organization faced in effectively carrying out humanitarian response.

In this regard, the following similarities were shared across the organizations. Investing in people is one of the most critical ways to improve response. Particularly in federated structures, the range of multi-cultural, complex, and diverse affiliates must actively work to create common standards and shared approaches. Regardless of the details of an organization's structure or processes, building relationships and trust across the entire organization is essential. This really is the critical issue. Federations work on trust and relationships not rules. Federation affiliates need to do significant work to make their federation function, and need to continuously do this work. It is not just a matter of putting a system in place.

Creating communities of practice and developing useful tools can facilitate communication and learning exchange. Each interviewee described some aspect of the tensions they face as a federated organization to balance a need for central coordination while maintaining flexibility and innovation, and respecting the various degrees of independence preferred by the affiliates. Additionally, all of the organizations were striving to balance local and global pressures while attempting to build organizational adaptability to respond more efficiently and effectively.

On the other hand, the organizations also faced unique challenges. Organizations that are focused on building their international capacity have had to take special consideration to maintain a fruitful working relationship with the country-level staff – ensuring that they too feel supported and essential in responding to emergencies. Other organizations have prioritized building the capacity at the local level and have been limited in the strength, size, and influence of the international secretariat. Organizations with broad missions struggle with how to ensure staff capacity in numerous skill sets, while organizations aiming to build niche specializations are challenged to reach a high-level of technical expertise and have the systems to deploy expertise rapidly when needed.

Our work does not point to any one operational arrangement being better than any other. Rather we believe it demonstrates that:

1. The operational structure must be a fit with the nature of the federation in discussion. One cannot import someone else's solution.
2. There has to be clarity about who in the structure takes the critical decisions and what the obligations of the participating affiliates are. This needs to be formally agreed upon prior to operations.
3. Differences in power, approaches, attitudes, and priorities of affiliates need to be aired and dealt with, not glossed over.
4. No matter what system you choose, prepare for it and practice it. Operation alising it from a handbook when an emergency hits is a recipe for further disaster.
5. The system is only as good as the people who steer and staff it. Recruiting, training, and retaining the right leadership, at all levels in the operational chain, is the most vital prerequisite for a successful operational structure.

Despite the challenges that organizations face in working in such a complex and fast-paced environment, each organization has been able to maintain and grow its position as a leader within the humanitarian community. This is in no small measure due to the excellence of their leadership, commitment to humanitarian principles, and building on years of experience in humanitarian response. It is clear that no organization is static –each aims to adapt in order to be a leader in addressing new challenges in a changing global context. As NGOs continue on the path of strengthening their response effectiveness, there would be great merit in continuing to explore the issues that are raised in this report and investing in understanding what these organizations do best and how could they do it better.

APPENDIX ONE: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Please think of a recent example when multiple affiliates of your organization were in volved in responding to a humanitarian emergency. Can you describe how this response was structured among the affiliates?

2. Please describe, in general, how your organization is structured for humanitarian response at the global and country levels.

3. Please describe, if any, which organizational policies guide the interaction among the different affiliates of your organization within a country during an emergency.

4. How well do you think these policies and structures have been implemented/adopted within the various countries where you are participating in humanitarian work? What seems to be working well?

5. How does intra-organizational/affiliate interaction vary from country to country?

6. How does this structure relate to other activities, specifically local capacity building and international advocacy?

7. In your view, what are the strengths of your organization's current in-country humanitarian response structure?

8. What areas do you think need to be improved?

9. In an emergency operation, how would *you* describe/design an ideal organizational structure an among all your affiliates?

ENDNOTES

1 EM-DAT: The OFDA/CRED International Disaster Database, www.emdat.be, and the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, Press Release, "CRED Disaster Figures: Deaths and Economic losses jump in 2008," UNISDR, 22 January, 2009.

2 The Interview Guide is included as Annex One.

3 Marc Lindenberg and Coralie Bryant, *Going Global: Transforming Relief and Development NGOs*, Kumarian Press, Bloomfield, CT, 2001.

4 Lindenberg and Bryant, p58.

5 Keith G. Provan, "The Federation as an Intergovernmental Linkage Network," *The Academy of Management Review* 8 (1):79-89.

6 Peter Walker and Larry Minear, "One for All and All for One: Support and Assistance Models for an Effective IFRC," Feinstein International Center, August 2004, **https://wikis.uit.tufts.edu/confluence/display/FIC/One+for+All+and+All+for+One--Support+and+Assistance+Models+for+an+Effective+IFRC> (accessed April 16, 2009).**

7 Thomas G. Weiss and Peter J. Hoffman, "The Fog of Humanitarianism: Collective Action Problems and Learning-Challenged Organizations," Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding 1 (1):47-65. And, Paul Clarke and Ben Ramalingam, "Organisational Change in the Humanitarian Sector," in ALNAP Review of Humanitarian Action 2007, ALNAP, p 21-82.

Feinstein International Center

Feinstein International Center
Tufts University
200 Boston Ave., Suite 4800
Medford, MA 02155
USA
tel: +1 617.627.3423
fax: +1 617.627.3428
fic.tufts.edu