

28th **ALNAP** MEETING

Host Government Forum  
on humanitarian response

EVIDENCE &  
KNOWLEDGE  
IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

# HOW GOVERNMENTS LEARN

**Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CEDMA)**  
With 18 member states, CEDMA coordinates disaster relief and encourages the adoption of DRR measures by its members. CEDMA recognises the diversity of its membership and their capacity to respond, and sees evaluation of response activities and the sharing of learning as part of a larger process of change and improvement at the national and regional level. CEDMA is starting to look at how states perform compared to targets and are interested in something along the lines of a 'readiness index' across the region.



## Jamaica

Jamaica experiences recurrent natural disasters, notably hurricanes. Although challenges remain, the country has seen a number of improvements in its disaster response capabilities in recent years, including the strengthening of response structures at the national and local level, the introduction of joint assessments and a 'one list approach'. Growing respect for the NDMA has played a large part in facilitating relationships and building trust. To ensure continued learning and improvement there are a variety of systems in place, including quarterly subcommittee meetings for shelter, welfare etc., bringing together stakeholders and sharing experiences. Post-hurricane season debriefings bring together private sector, NGOs and the government in a relaxed environment. Over the years people have overcome their timidity about sharing, and anecdotal accounts from all actors are valued in these forums. Increasingly, Jamaica's NDMA is bringing NGOs into its training programmes, while establishing national simulation exercises to prepare for response.

## Pakistan

The National Disaster Management Authority was set up in Pakistan in 2007. There are also provincial and district level authorities. The NDMA has produced several independent evaluations and learning documents after recent large scale emergencies, focusing on how the government can improve its response. The NDMA acknowledges the role of the international humanitarian system, but also believes government capacity building is important. Recently, a risk reduction policy was created with assistance from Japan, along with a 10-year plan for disaster management.

## Costa Rica

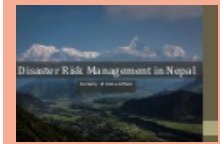
Costa Rica has developed laws and regulations around how to respond to disasters, and these have been important in driving improvements in response. The NDMA has put together a manual for all international and national actors based on these regulations, with guidelines on structures and standards. Costa Rica has no military, increasing the need for other elements of government to be adequately prepared. Costa Rica both receives and gives humanitarian assistance and was part of recent international responses in Haiti and Nicaragua, experiences that it finds useful for improving national response capabilities. The NDMA participates in a regional body - CEPREDENAC - which is similar to CEDMA in the Caribbean.

## ABOUT THIS LEARNING NOTE

This learning paper came out of the closed discussions at the Host Government Forum on Humanitarian Response that took place at the ALNAP Evidence & Knowledge meeting in Washington on 4-7 March 2013. ALNAP would like to thank the national and regional representatives who participated in open and frank discussions about how governments and regional actors are learning about emergency response. Thanks also go to Dr. Jemilah Mahmood, Visiting Fellow at the Humanitarian Futures Programme, Kings College London, for chairing the Forum.

## India

Various ministries are involved in any disaster response in India, and they coordinate around national plans. A lot of legally mandated guidelines have been issued for the different states and territories across India. The NDMA has held simulations in order to create locally-driven, multidisciplinary, sustainable efforts to deliver a quality response, and these have proven to be a key learning activity all those involved. A mega-simulation in Delhi in 2012 happened simultaneously across 400 locations to test earthquake response, and involved close to 55,000 volunteers.



## Nepal

The government of Nepal has been working with key humanitarian stakeholders, including the UN and international NGOs, to unite humanitarian, development and other partners to strengthen DRR in Nepal, under the auspices of the Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium (NRRC). This work has been undertaken in line with the priorities of the Hyogo Framework for Action and includes School and Hospital Safety, Emergency Preparedness and Response, Community DRR. The NRRC has also provided policy and institutional support for DRM at the national level, as Nepal works to strengthen its legislative and institutional capacities for disaster response.

## Indonesia

Indonesia is exposed to a wide range of disaster risks, and introduced a Disaster Management Law in 2007, followed by the creation of the disaster management office (BNPB) under the office of the President. BNPB's central role is to coordinate disaster management activities – a challenge given the different parts of government (civilian and military), the differing national, provincial and local levels of actions, and competing jurisdictions. Managing the receipt of international assistance is also a concern for the BNPB, and it is keen not to receive assistance where it will duplicate national capacities. Indonesia is also a donor of humanitarian aid. The budget for disaster response has increased and the private sector in Indonesia is increasingly playing a role. The BNPB has called for international organisations to become more involved in disaster risk reduction, rather than response.

## Ethiopia

Ethiopia has been in drought for 40 years, and as a result has shifted from a crisis management to disaster management model. Following a business process re-engineering study in 2009, conducted within the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Disaster Risk Management and Food Security Sector (DRMFSS) was established to lead on addressing the wide range of humanitarian challenges faced by the country. The government believes it has a good coordination mechanism in place, making use of taskforces and forums to sharing information. Ethiopia also has a national incident management system adapted from the United States. The three components of to this mechanism are: emergency coordination, incident command and multi-agency coordination. The government is also attempting to improve early warning systems.



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## CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

The Host Government Forum at the 28th ALNAP meeting provided the assembled government representatives the opportunity to speak frankly about some of the obvious and unexpected challenges of their work. The conversation focused on capturing learning and efforts to improve future response, but also covered topics such as coordinating response, engaging with their population, and facilitating international organisations. As it was a closed session, we cannot detail specific challenges noted by governments, but some of the broad themes that emerged in relation to learning and evaluation included:

- Fundamentally, there was an appreciation from many in the room that capturing learning is hard, especially if it's focused particularly on weaknesses, where people are less likely to document and share.
- Many aspects of a disaster management plan are so context specific that sharing learning is hard, depending on population size, political context and so on, and information need to be adapted in order to generalise.
- Equally, evaluations can often focus on a disaster abstractly, with no connection to what a country is trying to achieve in the larger context.
- A tension was identified between those evaluative activities that focused on learning, and those with an accountability function, whether political or to donors and others.
- Increased transparency was broadly seen as being a positive development in improving future response, but it was also noted that disaster response was inherently political, and this had to be understood when talking about what was working and what wasn't.

Broad issues around the nature of national government response were also discussed, including the increasing role of private sector, the need to involve local communities and the desire to link response, DRR and development agendas. There was also a stated desire for continued support from international community, but in ways that interlinked better with national capacities, rather than being inefficient or overwhelming.

### Government-humanitarian relationships beyond crisis response

Improving learning and knowledge sharing an important element of efforts to enhance the relationship between affected states and the humanitarian system, outside of the pressures and constraints of a specific crisis response. Discussions at the 2010 ALNAP Meeting and elsewhere have highlighted the need for a process of learning around how international humanitarian agencies and disaster-affected governments work with each other in disaster responses, with ongoing dialogue and trust building identified as an essential part of this process.

### Next steps: Disaster Response Dialogue

More recently, the International Dialogue on Strengthening Partnership in Disaster Response (IDDR), hosted by the IFRC, has brought together representatives from affected states with a range of humanitarian actors from different parts of the system.

Learning and trust-building are a huge element of dialogue; recognising that while states should facilitate the work of international organisations, the reality can be different.

The next IDDR meeting will take place in 2014 and you can find out more at [www.drinitiative.org](http://www.drinitiative.org).

