

SUMMARY

What We Know About Collaboration: the ECB country consortium experience

Emergency Capacity Building Project Shares Learning from Working in Collaboration to Develop National Staff Capacity.

Humanitarian emergencies are growing in frequency and intensity, causing more damage and affecting more lives and livelihoods. The capacity of humanitarian aid agencies to respond to disasters is developing, but in order to cope with the growing scale of the challenge, humanitarians acknowledge they must strengthen collaborative initiatives in order to share learning and develop national staff capacities.

The Emergency Capacity Building (ECB) Project responds to this need by establishing a collaborative initiative between six of the world's largest International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs): [CARE International](#), [Catholic Relief Services \(CRS\)](#), [Mercy Corps](#), [Oxfam](#), [Save the Children](#) and [World Vision](#). Through joint activities, the ECB Project aims to improve the speed, quality and effectiveness of the humanitarian community to save lives, improve welfare, and protect the rights of people in emergency situations.

Groups of technical advisors and field staff coordinate a variety of strategic activities at the global and national level through field consortia located in [Bangladesh](#), [Bolivia](#), [Indonesia](#), [Niger](#) and the [Horn of Africa](#) region. Consortia partners vary in each region and may include additional INGOs and local partners. Activities include multi-agency Simulations, coordinated needs assessment training, data capture and analysis, national staff development programs, and the dissemination of practical tools and guidelines for field staff and partners.

Background

Established in 2008-2009, the ECB Project consortia continue to work together on a number of joint activities focused on the core themes of national staff capacity building, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, and accountability and impact measurement.

The new resource ***What We Know About Collaboration: the ECB country consortium experience*** captures some of the learning from the experience of collaboration. It can be used as a reference tool for developing a consortium or for strengthening an existing collaboration among emergency response agencies and other key partners.

The learning could be useful for humanitarian and emergency staff working in country programs for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other stakeholders including UN institutions, local partners, communities, government actors and academia.

A collaborative process

Itself the result of a collaborative process, the recommendations and ideas were captured following interviews with ECB consortium members in five different countries and then shared with other members of the humanitarian community at five regional [ECBinter-active learning conferences](#) for comment and feedback. This resource draws on the practical experience of multiple national and international staff after more than three years of country-level consortium work.

Table A: SUMMARY OF THE KEY FACTORS, TOOLS & EXAMPLES

Part I: The Benefits of Collaboration	
Why develop a country consortium and what are the benefits?	
Part II: The 10. Key Factors for Success	
TOOLBOX REFERENCES	CONSORTIA EXAMPLES
1) Defining Common Aims & Objectives	
Toolbox 1 & 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consortium Engagement Plan (CEP) (p.23) • The Good Enough Guide and Accompanying Materials (p.23) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrating accountability to communities in Indonesia (p.10) • Assessing capacity in the Horn of Africa (p.11)
2) Ensuring Effective Leadership	
Toolbox 3 & 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core Humanitarian Competency Framework (p.23) • Humanitarian Staff Development Project (p.24) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bolivia recognises leadership skills at all levels (p.12)
3) Ensuring Alignment	
Toolbox 5, 6 and 7 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building Trust in Diverse Teams (p.24) • Simulations Administrator’s Guide (p.24) • Consortium Self-Assessment Survey (CSAS) (p.25) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building trust in Bangladesh (p.13)
4) Demonstrating Visible Support and Reliable Commitment	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration and creativity in Bangladesh (p.14)
5) Prioritizing staff time to facilitate and support the process	
Toolbox 8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Partnership Initiative (p.26) • The Partnership Brokering Project (p. 26) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preferred qualities of consortium participants (p.15) • Collaboration, commitment and consistency in Bolivia (p.16)
6) Ensuring Transparent, Effective Communication	
Toolbox 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good Enough Guide (p.23) • Listening Project & Infoasaid initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick decisions and consortium protocols in Indonesia (p.17)
7) Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities	
8) Funding the Process	
Reference: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECB Case Study on Joint Fundraising (p.19) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Off the beaten track – Uganda funding (p.19) • Joint fundraising opportunities in Bolivia (p.19)
9) Finding Common Approaches	
Toolbox 9, 10, 11 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECB World Vision Adventures in Partnering Case Study A: Coming Together to Reduce the Impact of Disasters in Bolivia (p.26.) • Towards Resilience: DRR & CCA Guide (p.27) • A Guide to Measuring Change (2012) (p.27) • Addressing Staff Retention in the Horn of Africa (p. 27) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocating for risk reduction in Bangladesh (p.20) • Identifying gaps: accountability in Niger (p.21)
10) Managing Crisis Within the Consortium	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accommodating differences in consortia partners (p.22)
Concluding Note (p.23) Toolboxes 1-12 (p. 23-26) and Appendix 2. (p.28-29)	

Robert Francis Garcia, Advisor to the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response, Oxfam GB, Philippines supports the release: "What we know about collaboration *presents key lessons in consortium-building in a succinct and well-organised fashion. It is focused on general principles, but also offers clear direction on further reading and additional references. It is a useful basic tool for teams embarking or further developing cooperation projects*".

What We Know About Collaboration: the ECB country consortium experience discusses the benefits and pitfalls of collaboration, and identifies ten key factors for success which include practical tips and recommendations. Success factors include defining common aims and objectives; clarifying roles and responsibilities; funding the process; and managing crisis within the consortium.

A selection of suggestions featured in the resource:

- Identify activities that cannot be done better alone
- Keep activities small and simple at the beginning
- Decide on a leadership model e.g. lead agency, revolving leadership or secretariat model
- Use simulation exercises to develop understanding of how each agency functions
- Go where the energy is: encourage members interested in particular activities to take them on and move them forward
- Consider hiring a dedicated 'consortium facilitator' and involve a number of agencies in the recruitment process
- Agree reporting templates and a monitoring and evaluation framework so that each partner gathers data in a similar way and results can be collated and analysed quickly
- Expect crisis and do not be discouraged by disagreements

A series of examples of collaboration initiatives and approaches from the ECB Project's five consortia in Bangladesh, Bolivia, Indonesia, Niger and the Horn of Africa underscore important points. These include:

Bangladesh: In the ECB Bangladesh consortium, a wider group of 20 NGOs are working together on a joint advocacy campaign to support those affected by disasters such as Cyclone Aila. This strategy is focused on advocating the government to enact their first Disaster Management Act as quickly and effectively as possible. Development of ECB Bangladesh's annual *Consortium Engagement Plan (CEP)*, which defines the common aims and objectives of the collaboration, is conducted in a workshop using a number of tools from the ECB project's *Building Trust in Diverse Teams* toolkit. The exercises in the guide were adapted to the Bangladesh context and helped to establish an open and trusting working environment. More recently, coordinated needs assessment training and post-disaster data collection and analysis is developing the skills of consortium members and strengthening relations with the government, United Nations, donors and other (I)NGO partners.

Bolivia: The consortium in Bolivia has doubled in size from the original five ECB member agencies as other (I) NGOs understand and support the benefits to be gained from collaboration. Bolivian consortium members provide co-ordinators for each of the consortium's technical working groups in addition to the consortium's lead and field facilitator. Consistency of participation is a key success factor in the Bolivia consortium. The Bolivia consortium's fundraising group is using a joint fundraising strategy to enable joint programming by smaller groups of consortium members and partners. Bolivia is working on many joint DRR initiatives working in local communities to train field staff on risk analysis and participatory planning approaches.

Horn of Africa: In the ECB Horn of Africa regional consortium, examples of joint approaches include where multiple agencies and partners worked together to deliver a simulation and training of trainers workshops in Kenya and Uganda. The learning captured from simulation exercises,

combined with studies on staff retention, is enabling this consortium to understand where to focus future co-ordination and emergency capacity building efforts and provide further training for their agencies. In partnership with the Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS) coordinated needs assessment training initiatives are planned to further develop the skills of consortium members and support the government plans to develop a contingency plan. In Uganda, the ECB consortium is working with the Government and other humanitarian actors to pilot DRR training and joint preparedness initiatives. A creative fundraising approach was successful in overcoming funding gaps, created joint activities and helped to further deepen the collaboration amongst agencies in Uganda.

Indonesia: The ECB Indonesia consortium uses the ECB Project's *Good Enough Guide to Accountability* to inspire community and focus group discussions, set up feedback mechanisms with those communities, and train partner organizations. In 2010, an earthquake and tsunami struck the Mentawai Islands in Indonesia followed by the Mount Merapi volcano erupting, displacing thousands. Within 24 hours, the ECB Indonesia consortium replaced a planned ECB simulation with a live test of the Disaster Response Engagement Protocols (DREP), newly developed by ECB Indonesia. The protocols provided the consortium with a structure and pre-agreed way of working that could be piloted during two small scale emergencies. Continued work to develop coordinated needs assessment training, an online database and data analysis skills with the Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS) is providing opportunities to strengthen national staff skills and work with government and UN partners to further develop assessment approaches.

Niger: Accountability is a key priority in the ECB Niger consortium. In a self-assessment of progress in building accountability systems, Niger consortium members noted the need for more resources to put accountability into practice, such as improvements to complaints mechanisms to ensure affected communities always receive a timely response to their feedback. Building on this accountability training, the consortium also more recently initiated their first coordinated needs assessment and worked in partnership with the Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS) to provide training for staff on capturing and analyzing data to inform program decisions during the food crisis.

The ECB Project community is continually developing an understanding of how to collaborate and learn through joint initiatives both at the global and field levels. Project communities of practice are developing and testing practical tools and case studies to support humanitarian country program teams. ECB Project resources provide additional guidelines and approaches to help a multi-agency consortium to build trust, accountability, leadership and simulation skills that will support collaborative initiatives to develop and thrive. The resources are summarized in Table A and in the Toolboxes annex.

While much of the resource focuses on a purely humanitarian capacity building consortium and the challenges related to joint activities, many of the experiences shared and approaches described could be applied to any multi-agency consortium.

To browse the resource online or download a free PDF copy, visit:

<http://www.ecbproject.org/consortium/learning>

View other consortia learning highlights from the five ECBinter-active Regional Learning Conferences: www.ecbproject.org/interactive

For further information about the resource, please contact Andrea Stewart, ECB Communications Manager andrea.stewart@co.care.org