Mapping NGO Networks in Asia Pacific

December 2014
1. Introduction

The humanitarian sector is characterized by a number of diverse actors and the relationships between them. Such actors include research institutions, civil society, governmental organisations, intergovernmental organisations including The United Nations (UN) and its agencies, movements such as the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), regional blocks for cooperation (e.g. ASEAN), military, private sector organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) - both national and international. Negotiating this system remains a core challenge in planning and delivering effective humanitarian responses.

Many attempts have been made to organise and improve the efficiency of responses through coordination mechanisms. One of the most prominent is the cluster approach; although it engages with a wide variety of actors, one of the main criticisms is the systematic lack of engagement with local actors (Stoddard et al., 2007) (Streets et al., 2010). For the most part, this piece refers to local actors of a non-governmental nature. This lack of engagement with local actors, the missed opportunities it represents and how to address these issues, have become an increasingly prominent theme in humanitarian discourse.

The World Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (WANGO\(^1\)) directory for Asia-Pacific has over 7000 registered NGOs. Engaging with local organisations can be hugely beneficial in preparing for and responding to a humanitarian emergency, yet such multi-level collaborations remain weak. Given the diversity and strength of civil society organisations (CSOs) and national non-governmental organisations (NNGOs) in Asia, this remains a missed opportunity.

The aim of the project is to document the existence of sub-national, national and regional NGO networks active within the Asia-Pacific Region. The project was designed as part of a multi-regional mapping exercise as part of the ICVA Regional hubs work plan for 2014 and complements similar exercises taking place in West Africa and the Middle East, as well as other related pieces initiated by UN OCHA, the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP\(^2\)) and the Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network (ADRRN\(^3\)) (Scriven, 2013).

The document begins with a brief introduction to CSOs and national NGOs, followed by an introduction to networks. Subsequently, the methodology describes the search methods and the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The data is then presented utilising a series of infographics, which is followed by discussion as to the meaning, implications and limitations of the research.

1.2 Civil Society Organisations and National NGOs

Although many enhancements have been made to improve and expand humanitarian coordination mechanisms, there remain gaps in knowledge and practice in how best to engage with NNGO and CSO networks. The growing body of literature advocating for greater local actor engagement has emerged largely out of operational assessments and programme evaluations of international responses to humanitarian crises (Streets et al., 2010) (Ramalingam, Gray & Cerruti, 2013)(WHS, 2014). These studies highlighted underwhelming utilisation of local NGO capacity and promote proactive engagement and partnership building with local actors.

\(^{1}\) http://www.wango.org
\(^{2}\) http://www.alnap.org
\(^{3}\) http://www.adrrn.net/about.html
Major initiatives in promoting this agenda include the 2005 UN-led humanitarian reform project\(^4\), the 2008 International Non-governmental Organisation (INGO) and ICVA Humanitarian Reform Project\(^5\,\(^6\), and the 2011 Transformative Agenda\(^7\). The Humanitarian reform project sought to catalyse change by documenting good practice for the effective engagement of international, national and local NGOs in the four elements of humanitarian reform: the clusters, reformed humanitarian financing, strengthened humanitarian leadership and partnership (Humanitarian Reform Project, 2013). Despite having on average, comparatively fewer resources than other humanitarian actors, national and local NGOs and CSOs have potentially huge contributions to make to a humanitarian response. Data from numerous sources, most notably in a joint report by a consortium of NGOs highlight the strengths of contributions of local actors to an emergency response (Ramalingam, Gray & Cerruti, 2013). Developing long-term disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM) as well as more reactive response partnerships with NNGOs has several notable benefits (DFID, 2011).

### Table 1. The Benefits of Local Actor Engagement

| Local actors are in place prior to any emergency | • Increase timeliness of a response  
• Negotiating access to locations with restricted access  
• Ability to decrease costs (Weak Evidence)  
• Increase coverage of the response (Weak Evidence) |
| Local actors have local knowledge of the terrain, existing cultural, social and political structures and language | • Facilitating and expanding beneficiary consultations  
• Increasing the acceptability of foreign assistance  
• Increasing community engagement, designing culturally and context-appropriate programmes and logistics  
• Important in framing the response within wider and long-term needs of a community |
| Local actors will remain in place after the emergency operations | • Improving the sustainability of programmes  
• Smoothing the transition period during phasing from emergency operations to long-term recovery |

* Source (DFID, 2011)

Given the potential advantages in local actor engagement, developing sustainable and productive partnerships with local actors is of great interest to the wider humanitarian sector. This is of particular interest in Asia Pacific for two reasons. First, owing to the growth of civil society in the middle income and rapidly developing countries in the region. Second, owing to

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\(^4\) [http://www.globalhumanitarianplatform.org/doc00001764.html](http://www.globalhumanitarianplatform.org/doc00001764.html)  
\(^5\) [https://icvanetwork.org/node/6097](https://icvanetwork.org/node/6097)  
\(^7\) [http://www.google.co.th/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&ved=0CCIQFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.humanitarianinfo.org%2Fiasc%2Fdownloaddoc.aspx%3FdocID%3D5970%26type%3Dpdf&ei=i26GVPnEda78gPn-Eda78gPn&usg=AFQjCNGdUaaMz8OBhHyTQxD4xfxZKsX8AA&sig2=Cn2VCrdnHLVdkwOU-n6M2g&bvm=bv.81449611.d.dGc&cad=rja]
the particular vulnerability of the region to natural disasters, which are predicted to become more frequent in association with climate change. Proactively building disaster risk reduction and mitigation strategies and utilising local response capacity can help increase efficiency and effectiveness in future emergencies.

1.3 Networks

Organisations with similar mandates often cluster and form partnerships and networks that have a unique role in the humanitarian system. Such networks occur in and between all layers of the system. Networks are vital tools in negotiating and understanding the humanitarian system. Given the huge number of actors, networks also represent an opportunity to engage with multiple organisations through a single focal point.

A network is loosely defined as “a collection of interconnected actors”. The rise of the network has been documented in detail in the ADRRN-ALNAP: A Networked Response report (Scriven, 2013), which describes the history and importance of networks in greater detail. In essence, and for the purpose of this study:

A network is a group or platform for organisations that voluntarily cooperate, which has a distinct group of recognisable functions and often also has spatial considerations. They are often characterised on-going mutually beneficial relationships with horizontal or facilitated exchanges between such actors seeking to foster collaborations, share information and knowledge and forward the cause through strength in numbers.

The utility of networks is derived from their ability to:
- Promote learning and sharing of knowledge and resources
- Facilitate community building and networking
- Serve as focal points for different stakeholders
- Collectively influence policy and set standards
- Coordinate members
- Promote efficiency, accountability and visibility

2 Methodologies

The project was designed as part of a multi-regional mapping exercise by ICVA. The aim of the project is to identify sub-national, national and regional networks of CSOs and NNGOs located in the Asia Pacific region.

2.1 Defining a network

A network is a group or platform for organisations to voluntarily cooperate, have a distinct group of recognisable functions; often characterised by on-going, mutually beneficial relationships with horizontal or facilitated exchanges between such actors seeking to foster collaborations, share information and knowledge and forward the cause through strength in numbers.

2.2 Search Methods

The search methodology is comprised of a multistep process. First, a literature search identified relevant published material; this search entailed identification of relevant published annual reports, guidance documents, etc. as developed by key stakeholders in working in humanitarian coordination including the UN, humanitarian country teams (HCTs), ALNAP, etc. Second, a
screening of membership and associate lists of ICVA and ICVA’s national host organisation in Thailand, The Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APPRN)\(^8\).

- All identified organisations and networks were screened for additional organisations and networks, whose connections were followed up, in a three-tiered exploration phase
- Screenings included visiting online resources and webpages and looking for explicit mention of relevant organisations and networks within membership, associate and mailing lists, partnership lists, conference participants lists, etc.

The last stage of the search entailed a Google search incorporating the search terms defined in Tables 1, 2 and 3 that are entered into the equation below.

**Equation 1. Google Search Terms**

National/Regional term + Keyword1 + Keyword2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Afghanistan (Afghani)</th>
<th>Kiribati</th>
<th>Philippines (Pilipino)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia (Australian)</td>
<td>Laos (Laotian)</td>
<td>Samoa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh (Bengali) (Bangladeshi)</td>
<td>Malaysia (Malay) (Malaysian)</td>
<td>Singapore (Singaporean)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bhutan (Bhutanese)</td>
<td>Marshall Islands</td>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brunei</td>
<td>Myanmar/ Burma (Burmese)</td>
<td>Sri Lanka (Sri Lankan) (Tamal)</td>
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<tr>
<td>China (Chinese)</td>
<td>Mongolia (Mongolian)</td>
<td>Thailand (Thai)</td>
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<td>Federated States of Micronesia</td>
<td>Nauru</td>
<td>Timor Leste</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guam</td>
<td>Nepal (Nepalese)</td>
<td>Tonga</td>
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<tr>
<td>India (Indian)</td>
<td>New Caledonia</td>
<td>Tuvalu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Vanuatu</td>
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</tbody>
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\(^8\) [http://www.aprrn.info/1/](http://www.aprrn.info/1/)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Indonesian)</th>
<th>Japan (Japanese)</th>
<th>Niue</th>
<th>Vietnam (Vietnamese)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan (Pakistani)</td>
<td>Palau</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Korea (Korean)</td>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3. Regional Terms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asia-Pacific</th>
<th>South East Asia (n)</th>
<th>Pacific</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asia (n)</td>
<td>South Asian</td>
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</table>

**Table 4. Keywords**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keyword1</th>
<th>Keyword2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Association(s)</td>
<td>Aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Club</td>
<td>Assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaboration /Collaborative</td>
<td>Asylum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coalition</td>
<td>Civil Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>Committee</td>
<td>Crisis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>Disaster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consortia/Consortium</td>
<td>Displaced</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td>Emergency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council</td>
<td>Human rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federation</td>
<td>Humanitarian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forum/Fora</td>
<td>IDP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guild</td>
<td>Medical</td>
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<tr>
<td>League</td>
<td>Migration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partnership</td>
<td>NGO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secretariat</td>
<td>Protection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>Relief</td>
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<tr>
<td>Network(s)</td>
<td>Response</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Safety</td>
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</table>
3. Results

The first round of the search identified 87 networks for inclusion and 42 for consideration. After screening by ICVA staff, and incorporating suggestions and exclusions, a total of 97 networks were included and 49 excluded. The full dataset can be viewed in Annex 1.

71 national and ten sub-national networks were identified in 27 countries, in additional to 17 regional and multi-country networks. Map 1 and Table 5 below highlight the spatial distribution of networks across the region, whilst Figure 1 provides a breakdown of the geographic jurisdiction of the networks.

Map 1. Distribution of Networks

Figure 1. Jurisdiction of Networks

As can be seen, The Philippines had the highest number of networks of any country with ten, followed by India with eight, and Afghanistan and Myanmar with seven each. A total of 16 Regional networks were identified. Five of the Headquarters of these regional networks were located in Thailand, two in Fiji, India, Japan and Sri Lanka and one in each Pakistan, the Philippines and Malaysia.
Table 5. Networks by Country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Afghanistan (AF)</th>
<th>Australia (AT)</th>
<th>Bangladesh (BD)</th>
<th>Cambodia (KH)</th>
<th>China (CN)</th>
<th>Cook Islands (CK)</th>
<th>FS Micronesia (FM)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of the administration of networks, Figure 2 displays that 62 (64%) of networks had a secretariat. The administrative workings were not determined for almost a quarter of the networks identified. The management and administration structure of those networks that did not have a secretariat were not recorded.

Figure 2. Presence of a Secretariat

The oldest network identified was the Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific International⁹ - a regional network based in Fiji which was founded in 1965. The next oldest network, the Thailand Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSPDT)¹⁰ was created in the mid 1970s. As can be seen in Figure 3, the number of NGO-led networks began to increase in the early 1980’s. This number of networks in the Asia Pacific region has risen steadily since.

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⁹ [http://www.fspi.org.fj](http://www.fspi.org.fj)
¹⁰ [http://www.ccsdpt.org](http://www.ccsdpt.org)
Figure 3. The Growth of Networks in Asia

![Figure 3](image)

Figure 4 illustrates the range in the size of networks in terms of number of organisational members. Of the 87 networks identified, information on their respective sizes was available for 57. Of these 57, the smallest network had 3 members, whilst the largest represented over 5600. It is difficult to comment upon the average size of networks in the region owing to the variation in sizes. Measures of the average differ greatly owing to the range and spread of the size from 428 for the mean, 200 for the mode and 44 for the median.

Figure 4. Number of Organisational Members

![Figure 4](image)

Concerning the structure of the 97 networks, there was a variety in the composition of members. Given the scope of the research, all networks included NNGOs and CSOs in the constituencies. As can be seen in Figure 5, fifty four percent of the networks were composed exclusively local non-governmental organisation and 6% of exclusively INGOs. Ninety percent of networks were composed exclusively of NGOs, either national or international, or a combination of both and the remaining 6% were composed of mixed membership that included UN, governmental or academic partners in addition to national and international NGOs.
The 87 identified networks were active in a variety of different thematic areas. As was noted in the methodology, and as can be seen in Annex.1, networks were classified using predefined categorizations. Figure 6 highlights the self-described area of operations of the networks. It should be noted that the majority of networks self identified as operating in multiple thematic fields. The most common area of work was NGO coordination followed by a mixed mandate (broad scale development-associated work). Various issues concerning the labelling of area of work are discussed in the next section.
4 Discussion

The data highlights an unequal distribution in the location of networks throughout the Asia Pacific region (see Map 1). South and South-East Asia have the highest concentration of networks; whereas, East Asia and the Pacific States had few networks in comparison. Given the population sizes of Pacific Island states, this region had the highest concentration of networks per capita. The countries with the highest number of networks are the Philippines, Indonesia, Afghanistan and Pakistan (see Table 5). Both Indonesia and the Philippines are high risk and disaster-prone nations (UN, 2014) (World Bank, 2012), whilst both Afghanistan and Pakistan have chronic security and displacement issues. A large number (16) of regional networks were also identified.

Figure 3 highlights the increasing number of networks since the early 1980’s. This could be explained by democratic transitions, growing national autonomy, an increasingly wealthy and growing middle class or the fruit of investment in education.

The results also highlighted the variability in the working areas and membership structure of networks (see Figure 4). The research was looking most notably for networks organised and driven by local NGOs and CSOs. As can be concluded from Figure 5, they were represented in 95% of the networks, and 53% of networks were exclusively composed of NNGOs. Other actors (i.e. INGOs, government, academic and private sector) were thus represented in 47% of networks. The identification of numerous composite networks is testament to the levels of interaction and the bridging of the layers of the humanitarian system.

Limitations

The search was designed to identify the majority of networks operating in the Asia Pacific. It was not designed to be an exhaustive list but to develop a “living document”.

Another limitation with the data arises from the classification of the thematic areas of the work of the network. For example, NGO coordination was explicitly stated as a purpose of the network in a variety of instances by networks themselves and was thus noted. However, many of the networks identified are by default engaged with NGO coordination yet did not explicitly self-describe this function. The frequent use of synonyms and general mandate meant that classifying focus areas constituted quite a challenge. Furthermore, many networks and their constituent members are operational in a wide variety of work. Some of these were relevant to the study and others were not. Those who had some areas of operations within or similar to the thematic areas of interest were included in the additional sheet in Annex. 1. Finally, the multi-mandated nature of networks blurred classification, because although not explicitly a humanitarian actor, during an emergency many organisations become engaged with humanitarian response.

There is an increasing recognition of the importance of local actors in mitigating and responding to emergencies. This has been driven by a series of emergency response evaluations, NGO-led initiatives and most recently by a series of on-going World Humanitarian Summits regional consultations. The recurrent outcomes across the three consultations concluded thus far (as of November, 2014) have been to increase the effectiveness and timeliness of response by better engaging local stakeholders (WHS, 2014a) (WHS, 2014b) (WHS, 2014c). Given the range of local actors and the availability of coordinating bodies to facilitate rapid and widespread outreach, the availability of networks should represent an entry point for those wishing to seek engagement with local
organisations. It is hoped that this research, may be utilised as a resource by local, national and international humanitarian actors seeking to identify, engage with and utilise the capacities of local and national civil society and non-governmental organisations.

Useful Links

http://drrprojects.net
https://icvanetwork.org
http://www.alnap.org
http://www.odihpn.org
http://www.ong-ngo.org
http://www.solutionexchange-un.net/index.html
http://www.wango.org

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United Nations (UN), 2014. Country Profile,
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World Humanitarian Summit (WHS). 2014c. North and South East Asia: Online consultation summary. Available at: http://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/bitcache/bb677ad0a1cb5912eff142a3188b5ffbf0a6e23?vid=487145&disposition=inline&op=view