

This is the postprint (the author's post-peer review, accepted paper submitted for final publication by Inderscience) of the article: Gonçalves, P., & Moshtari, M. (2016). Collaborative initiatives among international actors within a humanitarian setting. International Journal of Networking and Virtual Organisations, 16(4), 346-361. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1504/IJNVO.2016.081652>.

Collaborative Initiatives among International Actors Within a Humanitarian Setting

Int. J. Networking and Virtual Organisations, Vol. 16, No. 4, 2016

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Abstract

There are a number of collaborative practices among humanitarian organisations aiming of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian operations. This study elaborates the objectives of collaboration among international humanitarian organisations, and reviews various types of collaborative network and dyadic initiatives in place in the humanitarian sector. Moreover, we discuss the extent to which the initiatives are employed by humanitarian organisations and the challenges for organisations to engage in the initiatives and act as a successful partner. We also review the challenges in examining the collaborative performance within a humanitarian setting and the factors limiting organisations to appropriately collaborate and attain the desired goals of their relationships. In parallel, we elaborate research enquiries, which may be insightful to be explored in next studies on collaboration among humanitarian organisations.

Key Words: collaborative initiative; collaborative practice; humanitarian organisation; humanitarian operations; international actor; collaboration objective; network initiative; dyadic initiative; collaboration challenge; humanitarian aid; humanitarian value chain.

1. Introduction

Humanitarian assistance is defined as an aid that “seeks to save lives and alleviate suffering of a crisis-affected population”, and “must be provided in accordance with the basic

humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality” (OCHA, 2003). A humanitarian operation is the management of resources, activities, and processes aimed at delivering aid/relief to the beneficiaries in response to humanitarian crises and in compliance to the fundamental principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality. These operations are funded by donations from individuals, foundations, corporations, or governments.

Proper response to the increasing number and the complexity of disasters is beyond the capacity of any humanitarian organisation (HO). In other words, no HO has all the resources (e.g. funding, time, skills) to involve in all types of emergencies and meet all beneficiaries’ needs. Each HO following its mandate provides specific emergency or recovery services to a selected group of beneficiaries (e.g. Oxfam finds solutions to poverty and related injustice, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) delivers medical help). Furthermore, HOs frequently lack experience and/or resources to enhance their capabilities in delivering efficient relief (e.g. need assessment, logistics, or distribution processes). To deal with these challenges, HOs implement collaborative initiatives to prevent gaps and overlaps within the supplied services or the target beneficiaries, which in this particular field means that given a particular amount of resources, more people can get the required relief services or products. In addition, HOs pool their available resources to jointly develop tools or methods to improve their capabilities such as needs assessment or aid distribution.

Academic papers and practitioner reports refer to cases in which the collaborative efforts were failed or successful. For example, in Bolivia a consortium of ten HOs have negotiated and have jointly decided on the feasible tasks and responsible organisations for carrying them out. In another example in Bangladesh, in response to Cyclone Aila in 2009, twenty HOs jointly founded an advocacy campaign to capture the attention of donors and media to respond properly to the critical situation of beneficiaries (Emergency-Capacity-Building, 2012). Logistics often represents one of the highest expenses in a humanitarian setting, and in

addition, HOs have significant logistical challenges in delivering aid to the beneficiaries. Collaborative initiatives such as logistics cluster in South Sudan provides platforms for HOs to conduct common transportation, warehousing or to manage logistics information (e.g. mapping services) which eventually can lead to relevant savings (Logistics-Cluster, 2011). Nevertheless, the lack or failure of collaboration among HOs resulted in ineffective aid distribution particularly in the last mile (Murray, 2005); caused congestion at local airports and roads (Fritz, 2005); led to injury or death of aid recipients struggling to attain services (Moore et al., 2003); led to competition among HOs over limited available resources raising costs and increasing delays for services (Chang et al., 2011).

In the following sections, we first define the collaboration concept and elaborate the objectives of collaboration among international HOs. Afterward, we review collaborative initiatives at two levels of network and dyad. Finally, we discuss and elaborate the challenges that limit HOs to appropriately collaborate and maintain successful relationships.

2. Inter-Organisational Collaboration Within a Humanitarian Setting

Inter-organisational collaboration refers to a partnership process where two or more independent organisations working closely to program and implement their operations (Simatupang and Sridharan, 2002, Cao and Zhang, 2011). In a humanitarian setting, multiple groups of humanitarian and non-humanitarian actors are involved in humanitarian operations, including donors, international NGOs (e.g. World Vision International (WVI), CARE, Save the Children, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)), local NGOs and communities, international organisations (e.g. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), International Organization for Migration (IOM)), United Nations (UN) agencies (e.g. United Nations Development

Programme (UNDP), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), World Food Programme (WFP), World Health Organization (WHO)), military, and local governments and the private sector (e.g. logistics companies) (see Figure 1). In this context, collaborations can take place between two organisations (e.g. TNT & WFP or Intel & World Vision) or among several of them (e.g. Cluster, Emergency Capacity Building Project). In this study, we consider collaborative initiatives among international actors including international NGOs, international organisations, UN agencies, and commercial companies.

----- Insert Figure 1 about here -----

Inter-organisational collaboration among HOs may be planned and executed through two general types of activities that are fundamental to humanitarian operations (Table 1): primary and support activities. Primary activities include the main tasks in delivering aid to beneficiaries such as need assessment or context analysis, and support activities include tasks such as partnership management, information and knowledge management or financial management that increase the efficiency and effectiveness of primary tasks' implementation.

----- Insert Table 1 about here -----

Collaboration Objectives within a Humanitarian Setting

We characterize collaboration objectives among HOs according to two levels: a low and a high level of collaboration. The low level of collaboration includes collaborative activities that are carried out with a limited degree of interaction among HOs. For example, before a

disaster strikes, HOs could share information about their characteristics, as well as about regional issues and events, through networking initiatives. After a disaster strikes, HOs could share information related to the disaster situation or to the affected population. The goal is to share information and/or to adapt to the realities of the situation, improvise, and overcome obstacles to get the job done or to develop immediate solutions (e.g., expediting late deliveries).

The high level of collaboration involves joint planning or capability building objectives that require considerable interaction among HOs. Before a disaster strikes, HOs enhance their supply chain processes or operational capacities (e.g., logistics, packaging, and warehousing). After a disaster strikes, this type of collaboration allows partners to avoid duplication and gaps through the prioritization of target groups, a regional division of tasks, or joint projects. In addition, HOs share staff, supplies, and logistical resources or conduct joint projects. Table 2 illustrates collaboration objectives among HOs based on two dimensions: the level of collaboration (i.e., low and high) and the phase of humanitarian operations.

----- Insert Table 2 about here -----

3. Collaboration Initiatives within a Humanitarian Setting

We categorize collaboration initiatives among humanitarian actors at two levels of network and dyad. At the network level, a number of humanitarian actors (e.g. NGOs, UN agencies) found a consortium or forum to plan and implement joint activities (e.g. program, service, networking) with the purpose of increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian actions. At the dyadic level, only two organisations develop relationship and collaborate between each other to conduct common plans or decide on integrating their efforts in order to reach their objective.

Collaborative Initiatives at the Network Level

Reviewing initiatives at a network level, the first type of collaborative initiatives is forum or networking in which a number of organisations (more than two) strengthen the relations among each other and improve the quality of humanitarian assistance or international humanitarian system. These goals are possible by methods such as providing a platform to discuss the successes and challenges within humanitarian operations, or sharing information and best practices, which allows for joint-learning innovative approaches. Additionally, they can bring their activities or views to the attention of governments, UN, and international agencies. Furthermore, through networking initiatives, partners may develop and agree on guidance, policies, and tools and then implement them through partnering, coaching, or consulting as well as monitor and report on their implementations' results. One characteristic of these networking initiatives is that a number of them are based in a specific country, such as InterAction based in US, and some of them are international-based, such as International Council of Voluntary Agencies. Within this type of initiatives, a number of UN and relief agencies have established committees, offices, and programs to improve humanitarian collaboration (Balcik et al., 2010). For instance, the Office of UN Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO), the Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) develop system-wide humanitarian policies, establish common ethical frameworks, and provide accessible systems for information sharing. To support closer inter-agency collaboration and more accountability, the UN has implemented the cluster approach, establishing clusters of expertise in eleven sectors (e.g. nutrition, health, water/sanitation, emergency shelter, logistics, etc.). An important part of the cluster approach is the establishment of a consolidated appeals process (CAP), standardizing the process to appeal for funds from donors. The CAP goal is to expedite organisations' access to funds. In addition, the UN has created a central emergency fund (CERF), a common pool of funds

available to qualifying organisations, which allows them to ramp up humanitarian operations immediately after a disaster strikes.

The other type of initiatives at the network level focus on improving few aspects of humanitarian operations including needs assessment (e.g. Assessment Capabilities Project). In another effort by the IFRC and a number of HOs, the Sphere Project provides operational standards and codes of conduct for humanitarian organisations. The last example is the Emergency Capacity Building (ECB) initiated by seven agencies—CARE International, Catholic Relief Services, International Rescue Committee, Mercy Corps, Oxfam GB, Save the Children, and World Vision International—which has the goal of discussing and sharing opinions on the significant inhibitors of humanitarian relief delivery. Currently, ECB has uncovered more than 20 research findings, field tools, and practical guides which have been employed within the work of the five ECB Project Consortia in Bangladesh, Bolivia, Horn of Africa, Indonesia, Niger to enhance partners' capacity to respond to disasters (Emergency-Capacity-Building, 2013). Moreover, through the ECB international humanitarian NGOs jointly work together on figuring out and dealing with a number of key capacity gaps during humanitarian operations, including staff capacity, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, and accountability and impact measurement. The collaboration continues at the response and recovery phase of humanitarian operation too. For example, in Bangladesh in 2010 after the Cyclone Aila, ECB has brought together government and UN-agencies to develop a long-term plan to determine what the consortium would like to do together in the recovery phase of the humanitarian operation.

The other type of collaborative initiatives relies on virtual networks providing a web portal to share information at various phases of humanitarian operations. For instance, reliefweb.org and irinnews.org (Humanitarian News and Analysis), initiated by UN, gathers and distributes

information related to the situation of vulnerable or affected regions, and provides information about the characteristics of organisations present at the regions.

Collaborative Initiatives at Dyadic Level

Dyadic collaborations develop between two organisations. In a humanitarian setting, we observe several types of one-to-one relationships, including collaboration between two HOs (e.g. two international NGOs, one UN agency and one NGO), or collaboration between one HO and one commercial company. In general, when the relationship is formed between two international NGOs, the objective is to share their complementary resources to conduct their own or joint missions. For instance, the United Methodist Committee on Relief and Muslim Aid in a partnership in Sri Lanka shared their staff, resources, supplies and logistical support (Shaw-Hamilton, 2011), or RedR and Bioforce combined their capacities in order to train more humanitarian staff in their collaboration in Haiti (Russ and Downham, 2011). When the collaboration develops between a humanitarian organisation and a commercial company (e.g. Intel & World Vision or Telecoms sans Frontières & OCHA), the HO benefits through in-kind or financial donations or through shared expertise or capabilities (e.g. logistics, warehousing, or packaging). For example, IKEA provides financial or/and in-kind support to UNHCR's work (e.g. in Bangladesh, East Sudan, Kyrgyzstan, or Tunisia) and assist its partner in having access to its technical expertise in logistics, supply, packaging, and warehousing. In another example, Save the Children and GlaxoSmithKline collaborate to save the lives of a million of the poorest children in the world through sharing expertise, resources, and influence to tackle some of the leading causes of child mortality. Save the Children will be involved in helping GSK "to research and develop medicines for children, with a seat on a new pediatric R&D board to accelerate progress on innovative life-saving interventions for children, and to identify ways to ensure the widest possible distribution in the developing

world.” In addition, among the associated joint plans are to raise “the production and distribution of a life-saving product for newborn infection and the roll-out of a new antibiotic powder to help children fight pneumonia—one of the main killers of children under five.” (Save-the-Children, 2013). In another example, between TNT & WFP, TNT improves “the efficiency of WFP through critical logistical assistance, state-of-the art commodity-tracking and improved supply chain methodologies,” and in more than 30 WFP emergency operations, TNT makes sure that “aid is delivered in the fastest and most efficient way possible” (TNT, 2013). Dyadic or bilateral relationship is proper in respect to the feasibility and availability of time and resources to create an open and trust making environment (Care, 2005). Table 3 presents examples of dyadic relationships and a short description associated with each one.

----- Insert Table 3 about here -----

Our observation reveals that collaborative initiatives support HOs before and after the disaster strikes through information management, fund mobilization, relationship building, technology and innovation management, human resource management, and quality management (Table 4). In general, at the response phase of humanitarian operation, managing information (i.e. collection, analysis and distribution/sharing) about the affected region, the amount of demand and supply is needed to decrease the environmental uncertainty and deliver an effective response to the event but it is beyond the capabilities and resources of individual organisations. Moreover, providing information about active HOs on the field facilitates the creation of partnership or collaboration among different humanitarian actors to share resources or jointly carry out their operations. The next collaboration area is fund mobilization, which allows HOs to capture more donors’ attention and receive support for their efforts. Besides above activities and, in particular, at the preparedness phase of a

humanitarian operation, collaborative initiatives focus on sharing their experience, acknowledging the best practice, developing standards and guidelines, or capability building projects through training courses. Furthermore, a number of initiatives head to innovate new methods or technologies to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian operation such as supply-chain management, needs assessment, and performance or impact measurement.

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4. Discussion

Our research suggests examples of collaborative initiatives that have been designed and conducted within a humanitarian setting at various levels of collaboration and over the phases of humanitarian operation. Moreover, we observe examples of dyadic and network collaborative initiatives at preparedness and response phase of humanitarian operation. We observe that there is often the possibility for HOs to conduct their primary or secondary tasks through collaborating with other organisations or to employ the methods or mechanisms have developed by the joint effort of other organisations.

Acknowledging the various types of collaborative initiatives employed by HOs, we face two key questions: first, to which extent the collaborative initiatives are employed by HOs, and what are challenges for HOs to enter the initiatives or successfully engage as a partner. In the rest of this section, we preliminary address to these two questions and briefly review the challenges in analyzing the collaboration performance and those that limit organisations to appropriately collaborate and attain the desired goals of their relationships.

As many HOs only activate their operations after a disaster strikes, limited collaboration takes place during the preparedness phase of the disaster relief lifecycle (Schulz and Blecken,

2010). Often efforts to develop or engage in collaborative relationships occur only after a disaster strikes, when the hectic response is unfolding and when options, as well as time to address the requirements, are limited. In such contexts, it is much more difficult to establish adequate collaborative mechanisms (Pettit and Beresford, 2009). In addition, there is always considerable uncertainty about which HOs would be present in the affected region and the amount of resources they will bring to the field (Tomasini and Van Wassenhove, 2004). Such uncertainty leads to remarkable redundancies and duplicated efforts and materials (Simpson, 2005). Thus, scholars argue that to improve the impact on beneficiaries, HOs should collaborate not only during the response phase of humanitarian operations but also during the preparedness phase (Van Brabant, 1999, Thomas and Kopczak, 2007). As revealed in previous section, there are a considerable number of collaborative initiatives providing platforms for HOs to become familiar with each other, share their information or experiences or invest on enhancing their operational capabilities.

The other discussion point is about the entrance or engagement of HOs within the designed collaborative initiatives. Collaborative initiatives are often launched by a few number of organisations, but the goal of many of initiatives is to provide HOs a method or tool to efficiently conduct their own operations (e.g. needs assessment method) or to provide a platform to collectively carry out part of the humanitarian value chain while responding to a disaster (e.g. impact measurement). But in practice not all humanitarian actors participate in the collaboration effort or the level of their contribution to the initiative is not at the same level. In addition, many HOs engage in low level of collaboration efforts or those collaborative initiatives which exercise information sharing and identifying challenges rather than leading to necessary actions and implementing them. For example, monthly meeting of protection working groups in Uganda just provided ad hoc information sharing and did not lead to concrete results (Dolan and Hovil, 2006). Within the humanitarian sector, there are

factors which facilitate or inhibit the diffusion of collaborative initiatives as innovative products or processes among HOs in conducting their operations. Collaboration benefits are the main motivation to adopt a collaborative initiative. Innovative approaches support the collaborators to raise the level of response efficiencies, achieve a higher level of beneficiaries' satisfaction, or avoid the gaps and overlaps within humanitarian operations. However, organisational factors such as managers' perception regarding the costs of collaboration may discourage organisations to involve or employ the initiatives. For example, the cluster approach developed in 2005 is an innovative way to encourage collaboration among humanitarian actors (i.e. identify needs and gaps or speed up the access to financial resources). However, considering the financial dependency of a group of participants or the potential closeness of cluster leaders to actors engaged in conflicts or an affected region, a group of managers perceive clusters as threatening humanitarian principles (i.e. humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence) (Taylor et al., 2012). Thus a number of organisations such as International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) or Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) choose to remain as observers. Furthermore, other factors such as communication barriers, budgetary, cultural, or ideological matters have not let other organisational factors, in particular local NGOs, to engage in the cluster approach (Fredriksen, 2012).

The other group of factors is associated with the success or failure of collaborative performance among HOs. First, organisations' competition over scarce resources, donations, or media attention limits the level of collaboration or has a negative impact on the collaborative relationships (Van Brabant, 1999, Kovacs and Spens, 2010) . In order to maintain advantages over other partner(s), organisations may not share their valuable information, resources, or experiences (Parmar et al., 2007). Second, collaboration relies on relationship building, which is a resource-consuming process. Partners have to dedicate part of their resources (i.e. time,

human resources) to communication, information sharing, and trust-building between partners in order to enhance the efficiency of their interactions. Attendance of junior staff without enough experience at collaboration meetings is a sign of failure or poor performance of collaboration efforts. The other factor is related to the level of diversity between an organisation's goals, missions, perspectives, and technical approaches, which may inhibit the level of collaboration. Campell and Hartnett (2005) points to the important role of collaboration processes and incentives, which complete the role of coordination bodies that enhance the expectation level of partners of the attainable benefits of collaborative initiatives, inspiring them to invest in the initiative (Campbell and Hartnett, 2005).

Governance structure and power distribution within a collaborative initiative is the next important driver of a relationship's success or failure. Within the scholars and practitioners, there is an ongoing discussion whether a centralized-hierarchical authority or noncentralized-network governance may be a productive structure resulting in efficient relationships among HOs. The need for quick humanitarian response and the large number of actors with a high level of diversity among their goals and capabilities are among the reasons that support a command-and-control type of coordination. However, others argue that humanitarian context is multi-organisational in which the authority is non-centralized or diffused among a range of actors competing for media salience and financial resources, and have fragmented missions (Borton, 1993). Each actor looks for its influence on the decision-making process and the fair contribution of the collaboration results (Griffith et al., 2006). Moreover, the value of HOs' independency, the need to operational flexibility, or the important role of humanitarian principles (Stephenson, 2006, Gatignon et al., 2010, Wise, 2006) support the propensity of the majority of HOs toward network governance and a decentralized decision-making system. At a national level, the poor response to Hurricane Katrina is mentioned as the result of centralized structures, which slowly adapt itself to the dynamics situation of disaster

(Comfort, 2007, Bier, 2006). The poor design of collaboration governance discourages organisations to commit their resources on a joint effort or either implicitly or explicitly resists contributing to the initiative. Each organisation expects to observe that its interests have been taken into account, and no powerful actors intend to exercise power and disengage other partners (Campbell and Hartnett, 2005).

The last discussion point is about the proper evaluation of initiatives' performance within a humanitarian setting which faces several challenges and difficulties and may be explored by researchers and practitioners. In South Sudan case study, Taylor and Stoddard (2012) figured out that many of humanitarian respondents admitted the cost of collaboration (i.e. time, administrative affairs) but in overall were satisfied with the benefits of cluster approach. However some stakeholders such as international NGOs refer to the raise of bureaucratic affairs after employing cluster approach which eventually lead to an inefficient system. One explanation for the reported inconsistency among evaluations is associated with the low level of collaboration's outcome interpretability (Shah and Swaminathan, 2008). In other words, because of factors such as the high level of uncertainty within a humanitarian operation, the likelihood of having various evaluations on collaboration outputs are high, which may lead partners to misjudge the collaborative performance. Therefore, there is a need for systematic evaluation criteria tailored to collaboration within humanitarian context. Having an appropriate system of measuring performance of collaborative initiatives not only provides the possibility of easier interpretation of collaborative efforts, but also it is feasible to investigate the influence of interventions or new technologies on enhancing the level of collaboration at a dyadic or network level. For example, recognizing the effect of information and communication technologies on a collaborative network initiative' performance (i.e. capability building, access to information, knowledge management, inter-organisational learning, or dealing with inhibitors of collaboration (e.g. mistrust, power disparity)) supports

managers while comparing their alternatives and deciding whether to invest in a specific intervention or technology.

5. Conclusions and further research

HOs' limited resources (funds, human capital, logistics capabilities, know-how) and massive humanitarian needs put pressure on humanitarian actors to collaborate and run more efficient operations. Through pooling resources or joint operation, organisations can perform more activities along their value chains or increase the scale of their operations reaching more people in need. Through information sharing or standard setting, HOs can raise the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian operations. Collaboration through joint plans could help HOs to efficiently use the available resources, or joint procurement of resources could lead to higher negotiation power and lower costs which eventually could decrease the level of competition among HOs and improve service to beneficiaries. Moreover, through collaboration, organisations can share know-how, routines, and best practices, which eventually increase the efficiency of their operations.

In this exploratory study, we reviewed a number of existing collaborative dyadic and network initiatives. We categorized them into two phases of preparedness and response and into two levels of collaboration. As HOs' managers consider their specific organizational needs and goals (e.g., effectively implementing plans, enhancing operational capabilities), they should acknowledge the different types of collaborative initiatives to decide which one may best fit their needs and goals. Furthermore, HOs should be aware of the resources required for collaborations to reach the expected results and prepared to commit them, particularly when dealing with higher level of collaborations (e.g., capability building, conducting joint projects). We also discussed a number of challenges for HOs to enter into and successfully

maintain collaborative initiatives. In the rest of this section, we elaborate research enquiries that may be insightful to explore in future studies on collaboration among HOs.

First, given the important role of collaboration initiatives in providing improved humanitarian services, researchers may provide insights on how HOs may enhance the successful adoption of collaborative initiatives. Collaborative initiatives may include the relationships among organizations (e.g., regional alliances), or the development of platforms or technologies (e.g., Logistic Support System, Aidmatrix Network, American Logistics Aid Network, Humanitarian Logistics Software). Along this line, theoretical frameworks within the operations and information management literatures, could potentially be customized to guide HO managers and collaborative initiative developers in a humanitarian setting, helping them understand which factors may play an important role over different phases of a collaborative initiative adoption (i.e. evaluation, adaptation and routinization) (Chan et al., 2012). For example, technological, environmental, and organisational factors (Tornatzky et al., 1990), inter-organisational factors (i.e. trust, power) (Huang et al., 2008), or acceptance factors (i.e. performance expectancy, social influence) (Venkatesh et al., 2003).

Second, to appropriately develop and implement the collaboration initiative, there is a need to explore and understand the factors and challenges influencing collaboration. Several scholars have studied this subject and provided insights for managers and researchers (see Moshtari and Goncalves (2013) for a review). However, as Balcik et al., (2010) and Schulz and Blecken (2010) suggest there is still a need for comprehensive and systematic view of the factors and empirically figuring out *how, why, when, where* they play role within collaborative performance. In this line, the inter-organizational relationship literature can guide researchers in a humanitarian setting to explore collaboration from several theoretical perspectives, and even propose new theories upon rigorous empirical methods.

Third, performance evaluation has a critical role on HOs' decisions to continue its collaborative effort, or to exit it. Collaboration performance can be measured using several approaches. A first approach, commonly used by strategic management scholars, is based on the subjective evaluation of key informants (i.e. organisations' managers). This method captures the perception of key informants through questions such as (a) whether the objectives for which the collaboration was established are being met, (b) whether the partners are satisfied with the overall performance of the collaboration (Jap, 1999, Krishnan et al., 2006), or (c) whether the partners expect to continue or terminate their collaborative efforts for a longer time or for future projects (Cannon et al., 2010, Wang et al., 2010). A second approach is based on an objective evaluation. It develops a set of specific measures to examine the collaboration outcomes and then asks organization's key informants to determine their opinions on each measure. For example, whether collaboration with their partner(s) has resulted in improved performance, measured in different ways, such as improved on-time delivery of products/services, improved products/services' quality, reduced humanitarian operations' costs, increased access to resources (e.g. financial, equipment, skills, information), or improved operations/services' impact.

Four, research can explore the evolution of collaborative initiatives. Management studies have explored the benefits and antecedents of inter-organizational relationships, but there is still limited understanding of the evolution of collaborative relationships (Provan et al., 2011, Vanpoucke et al., 2014). Investigating the evolution of collaborative initiatives within a humanitarian setting will have implications for donors, policy makers, and HOs' managers helping them understand how to successfully form, manage, and support collaborative relationships. Along this line, future studies may contribute to the literature on the life-cycle theory of inter-organizational relationships (e.g., Jap and Anderson, 2007; Ring and Van de Ven, 1994) through empirical data from the special context of a humanitarian setting.

Future studies investigating collaborative initiatives at both levels of network and dyad sheds light into antecedents and performance of collaborative relationships and guides managers to develop or involve in collaborative initiatives.

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Figure 1. Groups of Humanitarian Actors during Humanitarian Operations

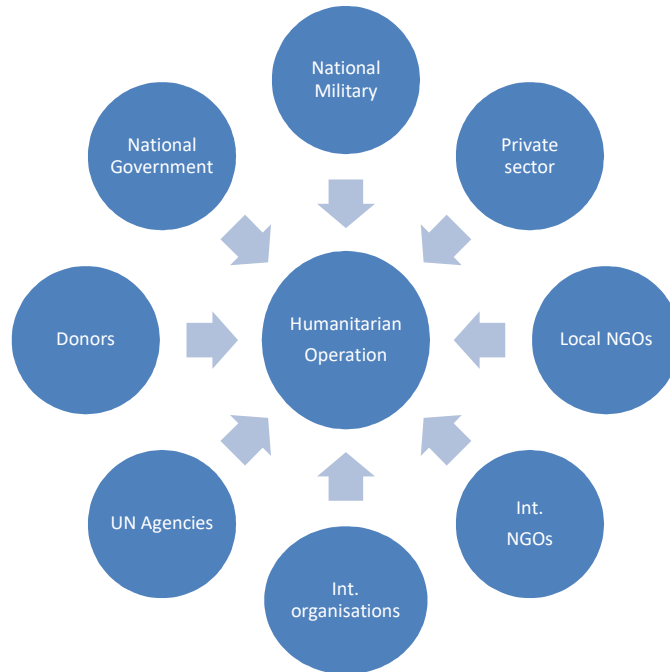


Table 1. Activities within Humanitarian Operations

Primary Activities	Support Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information gathering about the disaster situation • Need assessment or demand forecast • Fundraising • Context and capacity analysis • Planning • Procurement • Transportation • Warehousing management • Distribution (e.g. last mile delivery) • Feedback and performance evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership Management • Technology and Operations Management • Human Resource Management • Information and Knowledge Management • Product and Innovation Management • Financial Management

Table 2. Collaboration objectives among HOs

Level of Collaboration	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capability building (e.g., sharing technical expertise in logistics, supply, packaging, warehousing, and improving supply chain capabilities) • Improving the processes (needs assessment, quality management, tracking and tracing, and fleet management systems) • Developing operational standards (e.g., customs procedures, codes of conduct) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing resources (e.g., infrastructures and human resources) • Conducting joint projects • Context and capacity analysis or joint identification of critical issues (e.g., locations of supply chain disruptions or bottlenecks) • Joint planning (i.e., the prioritization of target groups and the regional division of tasks) • Optimizing the use of available resources (e.g., logistics, communications, and procurement) • Fund mobilization
	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community-building • Representing the group in policy-making institutions • Sharing information about the characteristics of HOs, regional issues, and events • Knowledge management and joint learning (exchange and dissemination of experiences and best practices) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information-sharing about the disaster, the affected population, and the availability of resources • Overcoming obstacles to get the job done or develop immediate solutions (e.g., expediting late deliveries)
		Before a disaster strikes (associated with support activities)	After a disaster strikes (associated with primary activities)

The phases of humanitarian operations

Table 3. Examples of Collaborative Dyadic Initiatives

The Names of Partners	Collaboration Areas
Bioforce & Register of Engineers for Disaster Relief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and coaching humanitarian operators (e.g. logistician, administrator, safety, project coordinator, water & sanitation experts)
Muslim Aid & United Methodist Committee on Relief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing staff, resources, supplies and logistical support
International Medical Corps & UNHRC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training in the areas of administration, logistics, standards and guidelines, and team development and management
Telecoms sans Frontières & OCHA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering services such as emergency mapping and emergency telecommunications in disaster areas worldwide
Intel & World Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing ICT expertise and training • Providing digital access to youth and educators in developing nations
GlaxoSmithKline & Save the children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial contributions (e.g. multiple-year grant focusing on malaria work in the North East of Kenya) • Sharing professional skills and experience to advancing Save the Children's mission (through an employee volunteering program)
TNT & WFP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving WFP' operations efficiency through critical logistical assistance, state-of-the art commodity-tracking and improved supply chain methodologies • Delivering aid (TNT has supported more than 30 WFP Emergency Operations)
IKEA & UNHCR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing temporary accommodation, life skills and economic empowerment (e.g. school books, IKEA products, mattresses, quilt covers and quilts, TV broadcasts, traditional and online media, and social networking) • Sharing expertise in logistics, supply, packaging and warehousing through workshops organized in collaboration with UNHCR's supply management service

Table 4. Examples of Collaborative Initiatives in Practice

<i>Collaboration Level</i>	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity Building Project • IKEA & UNHCR • International Medical Corps & UNHRC • Telecoms sans Frontières & OCHA • Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions • Humanitarian Accountability Partnership • Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions • Assessment Capabilities Project • Sphere Project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muslim Aid & United Methodist Committee on Relief Emergency • Bioforce & Register of Engineers for Disaster Relief • TNT & WFP • Intel & World Vision • GlaxoSmithKline & Save the children
	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alliance Against Hunger and Malnutrition • Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies • International Council of Voluntary Agencies • Inter-Agency Standing Committee • Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies • InterAction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clusters • REACH Initiative • Relief Web • Alertnet • Irinnews
		Before a disaster strikes	After a disaster strikes

Phases of Humanitarian Operation

Key Words: collaborative initiative; collaborative practice; humanitarian organisation; humanitarian operation; international actor; collaboration objective; network initiative; dyadic initiative; collaboration challenge; humanitarian aid; humanitarian value chain.