

## About this document

The Inter-agency Working Group (IWG) on Emergency Capacity launched the [Emergency Capacity Building \(ECB\) Project](#) in 2005, as a two year initiative to improve the speed, quality, and effectiveness of the humanitarian community in saving lives, improving welfare, and protecting the rights of people in emergency situations. In May 2007 the IWG commissioned [Social Impact, Inc.](#) to lead the final evaluation of this First Phase of the ECB Project. The [Final Report](#) of the evaluation team is now available at the Project [website](#).

The evaluation team consulted almost 100 key actors involved with the Project, including partners and field participants, and reviewed a similar number of Project documents. Their work brings to light considerable achievement and learning, and informs key recommendations for continued ECB work. This brief summary of the evaluation findings has been produced by the ECB Project team, to highlight key conclusions of the evaluation concerning both Project activities and outputs, and the effectiveness and efficiency of the Project's collaborative approach.

## Progress towards Overall Outcomes

Though the ECB Project's original vision seemed overly ambitious, the results, given the short time allotted, are significant. In May 2006, over one year into the Project, the implementation plan was revised a second time since its proposal – a five-year concept compressed into two years with half the funding originally planned. Despite this inherent challenge, the Project has accomplished many of its overall objectives, and IWG member agencies (with perhaps one exception) fully agree that the Project is aligned with their interests, and they are committed to continued involvement.

“If there is a single, basic conclusion to this evaluation of the Emergency Capacity Building project, it is that it was clearly worth undertaking and with strong, continued IWG and donor support, it will contribute significantly to enhanced emergency response capacities in the participating agencies. Further, with a dedicated external effort, it has major potential to improve response capacity in the broader humanitarian community.”

ECB Evaluation, Final Report, July 2007  
[www.ecbproject.org](http://www.ecbproject.org)

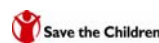
The ECB Project has worked through four *initiatives*, and the findings of the evaluation concerning each initiative are summarized below:

## Staff Capacity Development (ECBI)

**Goal:** to respond faster in emergencies and raise the quality of response with better trained and more rapidly deployed staff

ECBI is considered by many to be the most productive initiative, due to its clear vision, strong leadership, consistent staff, good communications, and phased approach with clearly outlined activities to reach intended outcomes. Agencies report varied but significant learning from all ECBI activities.

Agencies believe participants' commitment to thorough staff training, rapid deployment and quality response has already made an impact. Some are close to systematically measuring and monitoring their capacity, while others report that their global emergency response unit is increasing in numbers as well as competencies. At least two agencies have shown improved timeliness in response to recent emergencies, while others used learning to advance their country-level emergency preparedness plans and/or a restructuring of their departments or strategies.

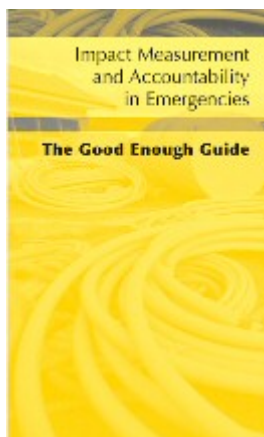


ECBI also worked with a number of external partners, such as [ALNAP](#) and [People In Aid](#), among others. By way of association with the ECB Project, partners report enhanced awareness and capacity in their staff. Though their involvement with the Project brings clear advantages, some partners would like to define their future cooperation with ECB through established agreements, so as to pursue activities in a more structured manner.

### **Accountability and Impact Measurement (ECB2)**

**Goal:** to improve accountability to people affected by emergencies and improve the measurement of impact

Though ECB2 got off to a slow start, it has since seen considerable achievements against its outcome and monitoring level indicators. A pivotal meeting of key stakeholders in February 2006 boosted momentum by rethinking project design and basing activities and objectives on more realistic expectations. Soon, the “good enough” approach was developed, according beneficiaries a central and participatory role in emergency response accountability practices and associated M&E activities.



[Impact Measurement and Accountability in Emergencies: The Good Enough Guide](#), a handbook for field practitioners, was published by Oxfam in February 2007, and is now being widely disseminated within most of the seven agencies. All Agencies

are working on plans to use the guide, while some are in the process of incorporating the Guide into emergency manuals and trainings. The Guide has helped raise awareness of accountability both at the headquarters level and in the field, where it has been tested and/or employed. For instance, the Guide was used to develop a beneficiary complaint system in Indonesia during the earthquake in the Jogjakarta region. These are promising signs of improved accountability that can achieve far-reaching impact if promoted to larger numbers of staff and more non-IWG agencies. The Standing Teams are a good model of Communities of Practice, but the challenge will be to fill the number of deployment requests and maintain this work as a priority within agencies.

ECB2 has also initiated the design of an accountability framework to use in peer review of agency work. Agencies have already conducted a self-assessment to define the baseline positions on accountability and impact measurement for emergency programs. While it is too early to comment on impact, these reflective processes have value internally for the agency and potentially across agencies (in future joint projects) and where ‘outside agencies’ can provide feedback and share methods, as well as learn from each other, with the goal of improving on a larger scale accountability in emergency operations.

Of the four initiatives, ECB2 has spent perhaps the most time cultivating relationships with external partners. While there were initial concerns about mission overlap, it now appears that development of these relationships has been beneficial to both the IWG agencies and partners.

**ALNAP**

**Disaster Risk Reduction (ECB3)**

**Goal:** to help communities reduce their vulnerability to disasters and to support cohesion within and beyond the IWG agencies on risk reduction issues

Three pilot projects designed to research and identify promising practices were implemented with the involvement of five of the seven agencies. Pilot countries were selected according to the disaster-types that agencies frequently respond to – Guatemala, for natural weather disasters (hurricanes, floods, tornados); Ethiopia, for slow onset food and drought disasters; and Indonesia, for earthquake and potential tsunami disasters among other weather-related natural disasters. The pilots emphasized learning and advocacy through sensitization about DRR at the field level, training on DRR to a diverse audience of key stakeholders, including community members, and the development of local action plans as part of the training.

Enhanced awareness of DRR principles was captured in reports from the field and from surveys, but it was evident at the headquarters level as well where agencies have elevated its importance in programming design and protocols. One agency has as part of their proposal process a ‘requirement’ to address DRR for emergency response. Agencies will be taking the lessons learned from the three pilot countries and using them as part of future DRR programming.

These projects engaged a wide variety of organizations and networks (Red Cross, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and other UN agencies, CARITAS, CARDI, and others). In Guatemala, IWG agencies are collaborating with all levels of government officials to develop or revise DRR policies, including the successful lobbying for local officials to update their

emergency response plans and to coordinate with community-based emergency preparedness committees.

To increase initiative impact, agencies would have liked to see the development of a compendium of best practices and useful tools to strengthen their collective voice in reaching the attention of donors and governments. The power seven agencies have to advocate for policy and program change, particularly at the field level, cannot be understated. This is perhaps an undervalued aspect of the project.

**Information and Communications Technology (ECB4)**

**Goal:** to better understand information needs in emergencies and the appropriate technology to gather, analyze and disseminate that information

Those interviewed described the work of ECB4 as having significant future potential, especially in the field, where technology is both wanted and needed. Field staff emphasized the importance of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) training and their ability to have greater “linkage” to headquarters on IT matters. While initially the planning for ECB4 was not as focused as some would have wanted, post-assessment activities and involvement with [NetHope](#) have dramatically changed

views and perceptions about the potential to apply IT technology

to emergency preparedness.

The extensive [ICT assessment report](#) with its key findings and identification of technology requirements provided the basis for ECB4 work and was extremely well received (there have been over 1000



downloads from the ECB website alone). The Skills Building program has major potential to meet the training needs of field staff. The ECB internal SharePoint website, as well as the Project's external website, are both valuable outputs along with ECB4 collaboration with other initiatives.

With plans for much of the work of Initiative Four to be continued by NetHope, there is considerable opportunity for outreach to the broader humanitarian sector. NetHope's relationship with non-ECB members, particularly a growing network of local NGO chapters, funded through ECB as a means to improve linkage to field staff in local NGOs, holds considerable promise for expansion of ECB4 work, bringing the benefits of IT to those engaged in emergency response.

### **Achievements in Partnership and Collaboration**

Collaboration, intra- and inter-agency dialogue, the building of trust, and learning were the most valued outcomes of the Project. Strong partnerships appear in all four Initiatives in a number of different forms - from an openness and comfort in sharing internal documents to joint emergency response efforts. With additional committed effort and willingness to share information, plans, and even resources, there is the possibility of unprecedented growth in interagency coordination and trust.

A clear understanding of partnership concepts appears to be a critical element in the ultimate success of the ECB Project. A partnership survey sent to 60 ECB agency personnel and to personnel of 10 partners revealed that relationships and trust building, tools developed, and increased accountability as top contributors to Project success.

Collaboration and partnering at the field level is still new, as field activities have only been undertaken in the last 9-12 months, but field staff are now a driving force behind collaboration. Ideally, in a second phase intended to focus primarily on augmenting country-level emergency capacities and response, country directors and partners should be involved in the planning and decision-making from the start.

ECB 'partner' organizations (non IWG members) emphasized the professional benefits of their involvement with the ECB Project, saying it brought new thinking, stimulated the production of quality, relevant resources to the sector, and for some, brought heightened credibility to their organizations. Building relationships with partner organizations is key to reaching the broader humanitarian community.

### **Management Challenges**

Several participants underestimated the management challenges and logistical complexity involved in Project implementation: many activities took several months to initiate; agencies and staff needed more time than anticipated to establish working relationships and initiative procedures; and field participation came later than most believed it should.

### **Goal Alignment**

The ambitious nature of the overarching goal wasn't clearly aligned with activity objectives; clearer synergies would have yielded clearer result gains. Key concepts referenced throughout Project documentation and dialogue lacked firm definition, such as *organizational learning*, *organizational change* and *partnerships*. It was pointed out repeatedly that there was no working definition for the term *organizational change* and attempts to

substantiate change without meaningful definitions or benchmarks is difficult. Many others noted that expectations of significant organizational change are unrealistic within a two-year timeframe. However, these same individuals believed that such changes could and would occur with a sustained effort over a longer period of time.

### **Project Approach**

The phased approach to Project implementation can be effective if given the necessary time to carry it out. A number of pilot project activities were still underway in late May and June 2007 for three of the four initiatives, and the integration of best practices and lessons learned has for the most part not yet occurred in a significant way. The exceptions are in some areas of staffing practices and the integration of the guide into procedural operations. For disaster risk reduction, agencies have reported moving this up as a priority and some have taken further steps to include it in proposals and programming. The ICT assessment has been used to review policies, procedures, and capacity needs with the Skills Building Program beginning actual field involvement. Scaling-up of pilot projects and institutionalization of knowledge will require more time to accomplish.

### **External Contributions**

Despite perceptions that ECB has been somewhat closed, there have been numerous ECB activities and events that included external agencies as well as dissemination of key documents and tools developed under the Project. Nearly all of the studies, documents, and publications are posted on the ECB website open to the public. Though this contribution is a first step toward broader awareness, it's risky to assume that information is shared widely because documents are accessible on a

website, especially when dealing with the international NGO community – many of whom require, or at least demand, direct attention. An outward looking strategy could be employed even in the last weeks of the Project, and any future work should incorporate an explicit plan, with indicators of success outlined, to seek the involvement of the broader sector.

### **Governance**

Though the Project's governance structure was designed to strengthen inter-agency trust and afford maximum participation in decision-making, as activities evolved this structure became unduly complex, with cumbersome and protracted decision-making procedures. A simplified and efficient management structure facilitates program goals and helps avoid the risk of process overtaking substance. Some suggest these mechanisms be streamlined for a second phase of the Project, in addition to modifications in decision-making authority for Project staff and for focal points. Focal points were originally expected to serve as Project advocates within their own agency, but they focused more on implementation activities than organizational change and policy promotion, due to the very high and unanticipated workload, as well as Project emphasis and direction. Many believe that focal points should have been dedicated ECB Project staff. This confusion combined with the complex governance and financing structure made their workloads unwieldy at times, so much so, that no focal point will continue in his or her role in a future Project. Still, there was overall strong agreement that being involved in the ECB Project has improved their organizations capacity to respond to emergencies. Agencies still feel strongly committed to the process and enthusiasm for the work, despite heavy workloads and signs of "burn-out."

### **Communications**

A strategic communications plan should have been launched at Project inception. Although one was ultimately commissioned, there was a lack of capacity to implement the plan. Communications were good within and between agencies at the headquarters level. However, communications between the IWG Principals and agency staff working on ECB were not always as clear or consistent as they could have been. More IWG support would have been useful for the Project overall. It's important to strike a balance between how many persons are needed for a decision and how many need to know certain details - this issue should have been revisited over the life of the Project.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are presented with the intention of being applicable to a continuation or expansion of ECB activities

**1.** The IWG should ensure that the continuing focus of the ECB Project is on the enhancement of participating agency emergency response capacity - and ultimately the response of the entire humanitarian community - and avoid any perception that the Project is its own organizational entity or an end in itself. This can be achieved by minimizing the branding of the name ECB; maximizing the openness of communications with agencies not involved with ECB by presenting at workshops, conferences, and by inviting agencies and organizations to events; and by hosting workshops with key stakeholders to clarify, identify, and reaffirm goal commitments.

**2.** Any continuation of Project activities must be flexible to accommodate changes in planning and implementation. This can be achieved by periodic reflection gatherings to

review issues and possible changes; strategic discussions about when the ECB acts as a group or when actions may be appropriate by individual members; and recognition of stages of adaptability and acceptance of ideas and innovations and capitalizing on these processes to more effectively influence the broader humanitarian community. Note: The innovation-decision process includes the following stages: knowledge (awareness); persuasion (advocacy); decision - an individual or decision-making unit comes to a point to adopt or reject the innovation (new/better practice); implementation (practical application); and confirmation (seeks information for reinforcement of their decision).

**3.** There must be early attention in any continuation of ECB to define and clarify authorities, terms, indicators of success, decision-making, and roles. This can be achieved by an initial meeting and one within the first year and/or circulation of documents for comments that would define organizational change, organizational learning, disaster risk reduction, and other important terminology used by ECB; clarify decision-making and related authority responsibility and establish more detailed protocols for dispute resolution.

**4.** The engagement of external partners such as those organizations with whom ECB has worked (ALNAP, HAP-I, People In Aid, NetHope, etc.) should become a formalized element of ECB strategy, particularly to assure outreach to the broader humanitarian community and to dispel impressions of exclusivity. This can be accomplished through the inclusion of partners in Project design and planning; inclusion of partners in field implementation activities; inclusion of partners in communication planning; the use of formal

agreements or MOUs with partner organizations; deliberate planning to build upon activities of other partners and not create parallel structures; defining indicators of success for each of the above by hosting a joint session to define these indicators.

**5.** ECB must undertake a more deliberate external communications strategy directed towards awareness raising on emergency capacity and preparedness and sharing of ECB information. The communication strategy should support learning within the Project and learning with external entities. This can be accomplished by assuring information management at all three critical ECB levels – within IWG agencies, between IWG agencies, and externally; sponsoring annual low-cost “knowledge fairs,” especially in the field (or regionally); recognizing that there are stages of adaptability, acceptance of ideas, and innovations as well of output of tools; and establishing performance indicators for communication activities at all levels.

**6.** Any planning or design preparation directed towards field implementation activities must include field representation in those processes. This can be accomplished by engaging the country directors (and regional directors if necessary), agency staff, and any other key stakeholders in planning and design processes for pilots or expansion of projects and ensuring there is a mechanism for voice from the beneficiaries themselves in the planning to implementation processes, as well as monitoring and evaluation. Potential mechanisms can be found in the Clinton NGO Impact Initiative report.

The importance of field engagement will be the critical factor in future ECB activities

and this involvement will require further support and innovative management approaches if overall ECB objectives are to be attained. This process will take at least two or three more years to change the culture of the operating environment and to ensure agency mainstreaming of products and services. This may happen without another ECB project, but a continued and consistent ECB approach will increase the speed and acceptance of that process.

**7.** ECB management should review personnel employment and assignment procedures to ensure transparency and necessary participation. This can be accomplished by involving more agency representatives in the recruitment and interviewing of core project staff; enhancing the stature and support for the ‘focal point’ function (or a successor position) by giving it more authority in financial and project management decision-making, as well as role transparency.

**8.** Budgeting and funding allocation procedures should be reviewed for more simplified and streamlined approaches. This could be accomplished by providing annual (not quarterly) advances of funds to agencies for project management expenses even if this means making an exception to one agency’s established funding mechanism; early budgeting and agreement on pilot project costs, with full amounts transferred to implementing agencies; involvement of project management and agency staff in the review of ECB funding procedures, with a view towards revisions that will streamline both ECB and individual agency processes and procedures.

**9.** Assure realistic expectations of time and resources that are needed for project enactment and activities. This can be accomplished by initial face-to-face meetings

with initiative/objective teams whereby direction, activities, and indicators are mapped out more concretely; providing for reflection points at periodic stages in project implementation to address issues, modify objectives, and revise activities and workloads if necessary; and allowing flexibility if agency or staff cannot commit to an activity or certain timeline because of other pressures. The Project as originally proposed was visionary in its aim and objectives, as well as in its general emphasis on emergency preparedness. But in its approved form, it was unrealistic about some of its expectations for accomplishment in such a short timeframe and attempting to accomplish these objectives in a shortened timeframe took its toll on staff.

**10.** For continued ECB activities, clearly define measurable outcomes and indicators for the overall goal and objectives as well as for each individual agency in terms of their improved capacity to prepare for and respond to emergencies. Refine these goals and objectives to obtainable levels. This can be achieved by holding an initial strategic workshop with principals and operational staff to define goal(s) and objectives. For agency indicators, use examples from the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria for evaluation, defining quality, effectiveness, efficiency, coordination, relevance, impact of response, and sustainability as possible means to measure overall impact in emergency responses. Draw upon Sphere Project guidance, UNHCR indicators, and other such examples of standards and indicators for overall organizational performance in emergencies and draw upon the work of public and private entities that may have established objectives for areas such as collaboration, partnership, and mentoring.

