

HPG Commissioned Report

**Funding collective  
approaches to  
communication and  
community engagement in  
humanitarian action**

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**HPG**

Humanitarian  
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# Acronyms

<b>AAP</b>	accountability to affected populations
<b>CAR</b>	Central African Republic
<b>CBPF</b>	country-based pooled funds
<b>CCE</b>	communication and community engagement
<b>CCEI</b>	Communication and Community Engagement Initiative
<b>CDAC</b>	Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (Network)
<b>CERF</b>	Central Emergency Response Fund
<b>CEWG</b>	Community Engagement Working Group
<b>CFP</b>	Nepal Inter-Agency Common Feedback Project
<b>CHS</b>	Core Humanitarian Standard
<b>CRM</b>	customer relationship management
<b>DEPP</b>	Disasters and Emergencies Preparedness Programme
<b>DFAT</b>	Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
<b>DFID</b>	UK Department for International Development
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of Congo
<b>ECHO</b>	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
<b>FCDO</b>	UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
<b>FTS</b>	Financial Tracking Service
<b>H2H</b>	Humanitarian to Humanitarian Network
<b>HCT</b>	Humanitarian Country Team
<b>HRP</b>	Humanitarian Response Plan

<b>IASC</b>	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
<b>IFRC</b>	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
<b>IM</b>	information management
<b>INGO</b>	international non-governmental organisation
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>IRC</b>	International Rescue Committee
<b>M&amp;E</b>	monitoring and evaluation
<b>OCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>OFDA</b>	Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance
<b>PSEA</b>	protection from sexual exploitation and abuse
<b>RCO</b>	Resident Coordinator's Office
<b>SDC</b>	Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation
<b>Sida</b>	Swiss International Development Cooperation Agency
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations Refugee Agency
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNOPS</b>	United Nations Office of Project Services
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

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# Executive summary

Since the early 2010s, a collective approach to communication and community engagement (CCE) has been an increasingly common feature in humanitarian crises worldwide. As a response-wide endeavour, collective CCE aims to improve the quality of humanitarian responses by providing consistent and accessible information, improving response-wide understanding and analysis of affected people's priorities and needs, and fostering two-way communication. It does this by breaking CCE out of agency or sectoral silos and fostering collaboration across a wide range of actors. Backed by a growing body of evidence (CDAC Network, 2019), collective CCE is also enshrined in system-wide commitments such as the Grand Bargain (IASC, 2016) and embedded in the terms of reference of Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) (IASC, 2017). However, even a decade after collective approaches to CCE were first piloted, many still struggle to secure sufficient, good quality funding. This has negatively impacted their ability to set up quickly in new emergencies, to function at scale and gain political traction once established, and to develop or adapt over time in line with the evolution of a crisis.

This report, the first study of its kind, draws on interviews with key stakeholders as well as a review of CCE funding data to identify ways to strengthen collective CCE through better resourcing. It does so in three parts. First, it provides a practical overview of the costs of different components of collective CCE, providing greater transparency on how much is needed for collectives to function effectively in different contexts, and seeking to address potential misconceptions about the scale and scope of costs. Second, it explores trends in the current funding landscape around collective CCE and highlights blockages. Third, it identifies how collective CCE can be better supported through a range of funding mechanisms.

A key finding from this study is that collective approaches to CCE are not expensive in the context of wider funding requirements, generally making up well under 1% of the total budget of annual Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) or equivalent appeals. Despite this, donors have struggled to fund them consistently. This is partially due to a lack of common understanding on what the objectives or structure of collective CCE should be, with some donors remaining sceptical of the evidence for its effectiveness. This is also compounded by the fact that the nature of collective approaches – which often require relatively small grants spread across multiple actors – makes them challenging to fund. However, the problem does not end with having enough money. *How* collective approaches are funded can be just as important; mechanisms most convenient to donors – such as channelling funding through large UN agencies – may not be the most effective at fostering healthy collective action. The challenge is therefore getting enough resources in place, in the right configuration and with enough consistency across contexts to ensure that collective CCE is fully embedded as a standard component of humanitarian responses in the future.

Different stakeholders can take complementary practical steps to ensure this happens:

## To donors

- Coordinate to agree on a shared understanding of the minimum viable components of a collective approach.
- Based on this understanding, coordinate to ensure that coherent collective approaches – and not just cherry-picked components – are funded predictably, at sufficient scale, with medium-term, flexible funding.
- In new crises, support rapid scale-up of collective CCE.

- Support funding models that strengthen collective action, support neutrality and avoid concentration of power.
- Link funding to greater support for local ownership of collective approaches.
- Ensure that collective CCE processes are embedded across the continuum of preparedness, response and early recovery/development.
- Work through inter-donor forums such as the Grand Bargain and the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative to advocate for more coherent and consistent support for collective CCE.

## **To Humanitarian Coordinators and Humanitarian Country Teams**

- Advocate for adequately resourced collective approaches, in line with the mandatory responsibility to develop a collective approach laid out in the standard HCT terms of reference.

## **To UN lead agencies**

- ‘Walk the walk’ by allocating a dedicated proportion of funds to both collective and agency-level CCE, drawing on unearmarked funding to do so in the absence of donor commitment.
- Establish a firewall between budgets for collective CCE and agency-level CCE activities, in order to ensure the neutrality and independence of collective approaches.
- When handling funds on behalf of collectives, support transparency and foster a more collaborative spirit by involving all stakeholders across the programme cycle, from design through to evaluation phases.

## **To actors designing and implementing collective approaches**

- Build in mechanisms to monitor and document how collective approaches impact decision-making within humanitarian responses as standard in all collective approaches.
- Coordinate to sensitise donors on collective CCE and its role in improving humanitarian responses.
- Conduct mapping of donors at global and country level to better understand how different donors’ priorities and interests intersect with collective approaches.

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# 1 Introduction

Recent years have seen a growing emphasis within the humanitarian sector for better communication and community engagement (CCE). The idea that communities affected by crisis should be involved in a meaningful two-way dialogue with the humanitarians seeking to assist them has been laid out in a number of system-wide commitments over the past decade. These include the 2014 Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), the ‘participation revolution’ envisioned under the 2016 Grand Bargain and the 2017 Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Commitments on Accountability to Affected People. Together, these commitments have highlighted three core components of effective CCE: information sharing with affected communities, feedback and complaints, and participation (CDAC Network, 2017).

As this trend has developed, several actors have worked to emphasise the potential for collective approaches to CCE – supplementing or integrating existing agency- or programme-level activities – to improve the quality and effectiveness of humanitarian responses (ibid.). While extensive guidance on implementing collective CCE exists (e.g. CDAC Network, 2017; 2019; Peer 2 Peer Support, 2017) there is at present no commonly agreed definition of what it actually is. Drawing on existing literature, HPG has developed a definition for the purposes of this research that defines a collective approach to CCE as:

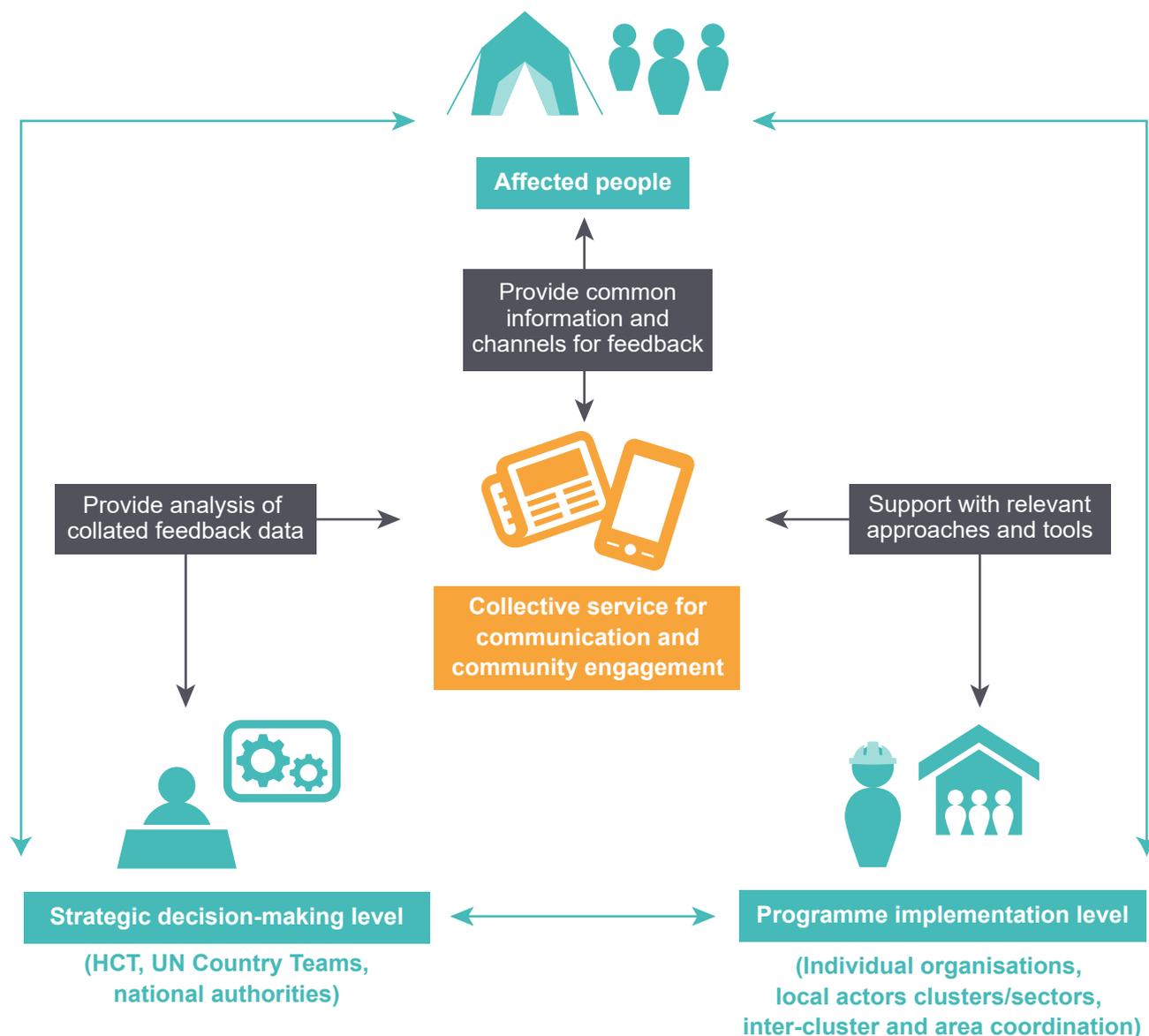
A multi-actor initiative that encompasses the humanitarian response as a whole, rather than a single individual agency or programme, and focuses on two-way communication: providing information about the situation and services to affected communities; gathering information from these communities via feedback,

perspectives and inputs; and closing the feedback loop by informing the communities as to how their input has been taken into account. The goal of a collective approach to CCE is the increased accountability to and participation of affected communities in their own response.

Collective approaches to CCE are still a relatively novel concept within the humanitarian system. First piloted in Haiti during the 2010 earthquake, they have been implemented in various forms and to varying degrees of success across multiple contexts in recent years, for example in the 2015 Nepal earthquake and the ongoing Rohingya refugee response. There is no single model for what a collective approach should look like, with various versions developed in accordance with the needs and constraints of different contexts – some may be more structured and hierarchical, others might be more open and collaborative. However, common components tend to include coordination platforms – such as community engagement working groups – combined with common services – such as inter-agency hotlines, rumour tracking and inter-agency feedback platforms. These components may be tightly linked under a single overarching strategy or programme, or may function more loosely as a collection of services fulfilling complementary objectives. In general, collective approaches aim to complement rather than replace agency-level CCE activities, and indeed depend on such activities in order to function effectively. Figures 1 and 2 provide an overview of the functions and structure of an idealised collective approach.

At present, multiple efforts are underway to strengthen and systematise how collective CCE is implemented in humanitarian contexts. These include the Communicating with Disaster

**Figure 1: The functions of a collective approach**



Source: adapted from CCEI (2017)

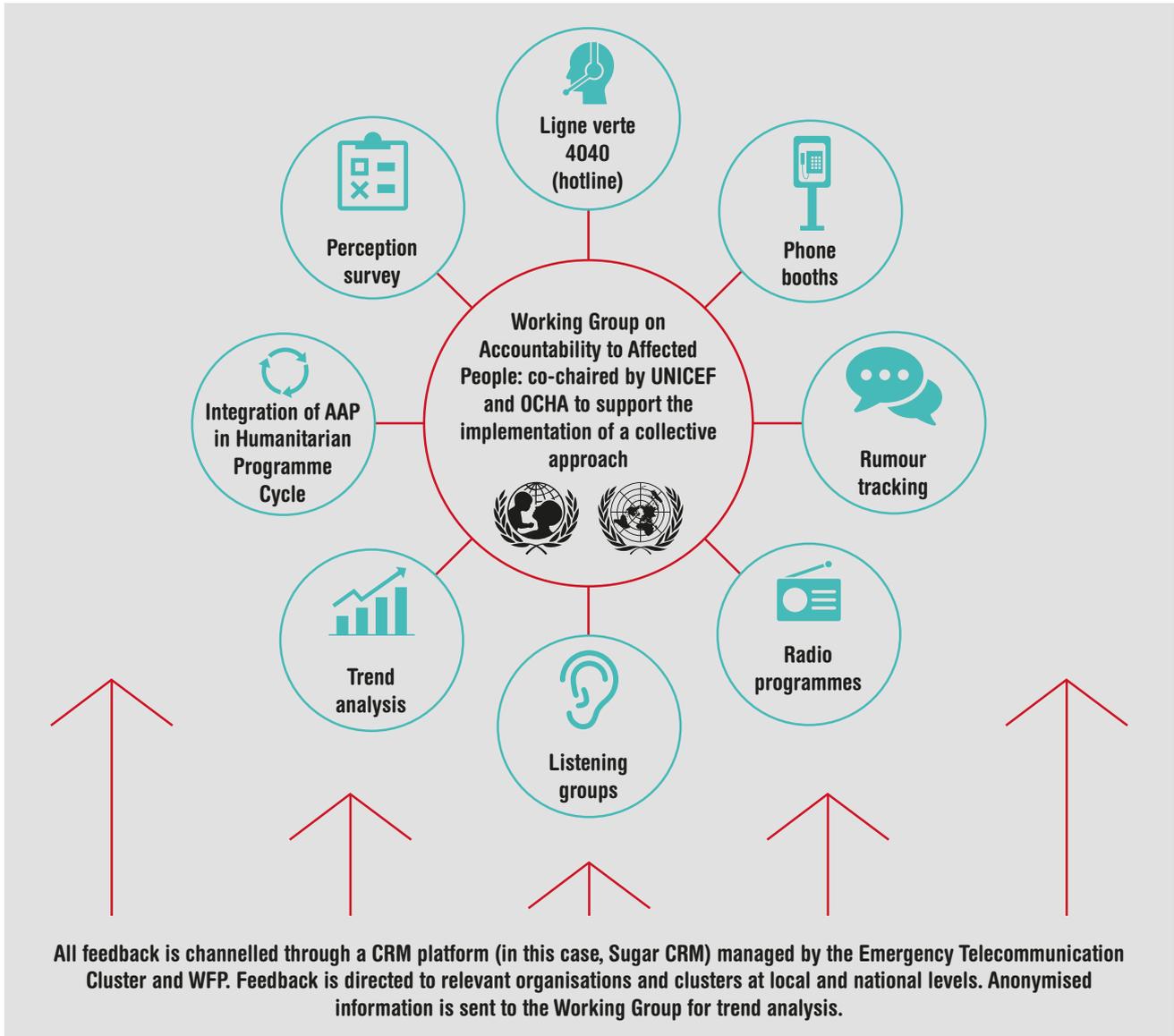
Affected Communities (CDAC) Network’s work developing guidance materials and strengthening preparedness platforms, the Communication and Community Engagement Initiative (CCEI), and the IASC’s Results Group 2 on Accountability and Inclusion.<sup>1</sup> In the context of the ongoing Covid-19 global pandemic, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and

the World Health Organization (WHO) have also launched a Global Collective Service for risk communication and community engagement, which aims to strengthen collective approaches that bridge humanitarian and public health emergency work.

This report, the first study of its kind, draws on interviews with key stakeholders as well as a review of CCE funding data to identify ways to strengthen collective CCE through

<sup>1</sup> The CCEI was established in January 2017 as a collaboration between the CDAC Network, IFRC, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and UNICEF. The initiative seeks ‘to organise a collective service’ and create ‘a more systematic and coordinated approach ... through a harmonised, timely, systematic and predictable collective service’. In early 2020, CCEI was incorporated into IASC Results Group 2.

**Figure 2: Example structure of a collective approach (Central African Republic, 2020)**



Source: Barbelet (2020)

better resourcing. Specifically, it seeks to inform discussion by providing evidence on the cost and cost drivers of collective CCE, as well as examining incentives, challenges and options for funding collective CCE moving forward. It forms part of a wider project commissioned by UNICEF on behalf of the CCEI, comprising multiple country case studies (Barbelet, 2020; Dewulf et al., 2020; El-Tarabousi-McCarthy et al., 2020; Holloway and Fan, 2020; Lough et al., 2020), which aims to identify solutions to address current bottlenecks and challenges to collective approaches to CCE, as well as develop evidence of the added value and limitations of collective approaches.

## 1.1 Methodology

This study used a mixed-methods approach. To collect data on attitudes and perceptions regarding funding of collective CCE, 20 in-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders between April and June 2020. These included staff from donor governments, funding networks, United Nations (UN) agencies, the Red Cross movement and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) (see Table 1). Participants were purposively sampled to include influential actors in the humanitarian donor community as well as organisations closely involved with efforts on collective CCE at global and country levels.

Primary data collection was supplemented with a secondary data review focusing on identifying the scale and drivers of cost for different models of collective CCE. This drew on a range of sources, including budgets provided by key stakeholder respondents, OCHA's Financial Tracking Service (FTS), information from the project's country case studies, and background literature including project evaluations and CCEI and CDAC Network reports.

The research encountered the following key limitations. First, a number of key donors and other stakeholders were not available for interview due to competing priorities generated by the ongoing Covid-19 global pandemic. Second, respondents were limited to actors directly engaged in humanitarian response, meaning that complementary perspectives from actors working in public health emergencies or development are absent from the study. Third, due to its focus on global-level trends, the study did not consult directly with actors working on CCE at country level, meaning that the voices of national and local NGOs in particular are absent from this study. Where possible, the perspectives of these actors have been drawn in through secondary data review. Fourth, the amount of time and resources available for the study did not allow for attempts at systematic cost effectiveness/efficiency analyses of collective CCE. Similarly, it was also not possible to secure enough data to draw clear conclusions from comparing the costs of collective CCE with those of non-collective, agency-level CCE. These issues are discussed in greater depth in chapter 2.

**Table 1: Interviews with key stakeholders**

Stakeholder	Interviews
Donor governments	5
INGOs	5
UN agencies	4
Inter-organisational alliances	3
Funding networks	2
Red Cross movement	1

## 1.2 Outline of the report

Chapter 2 focuses on the cost and cost drivers of collective approaches, outlining the cost of different models of collective approach and their key components, and examining the relevance of cost comparisons with agency-level approaches. Chapter 3 provides an overview of key issues in the current funding landscape for collective approaches to CCE, focusing on funding bottlenecks, preparedness and sustainability, and resourcing for local organisations, before going on to examine donor attitudes and priorities on funding collective approaches. Chapter 4 examines how collective approaches are currently funded, providing an overview of funding for collective approaches in different contexts, outlining key funding modalities currently in use and examining their strengths and weaknesses in terms of how far they support the work of collective approaches. Chapter 5 concludes the report and offers recommendations.

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## 2 How much do collective approaches cost?

Collective approaches to CCE have varying costs depending on their management structure, components and location, as well as the continuity of funding and sustainability of these mechanisms. While these costs may vary widely, it is important to recognise these interventions are relatively inexpensive in comparison to the wider humanitarian response. However, cheap does not mean free. Collective CCE still requires dedicated human resources and equipment, which must be adequately resourced if it is to function at sufficient quality and scale to be impactful.

Differences in management structure and components constitute some of the largest cost variations and stem from a lack of consensus regarding what constitutes a ‘minimum viable approach’.<sup>2</sup> Instead, there are a range of models in use for collective approaches, spanning from relatively minimalist models involving small amounts of dedicated capacity support and in-kind contributions from partners (for example, Indonesia – see Holloway and Fan, 2020), to UN-led systems involving substantial numbers of independently funded common services (for example, the Central African Republic (CAR) – see Barbelet, 2020). Further to this, the price of goods and services vary around the world and in different emergency situations. Start-up costs are also a consideration, especially if an approach has to scale up more than once. As one INGO respondent explained, ‘[if you have] continuity of funding you have cost savings, otherwise you have to re-spend those expensive start-up costs’.

When discussing costs in an era of increasing humanitarian need and shortfalls in funding, it is important to recognise that highlighting and exploring the costs of collective approaches to CCE is not an attempt to minimise them. As shared by an employee of a UN agency, ‘to do it cheaply [means] you don’t necessarily get good results’. Rather, exploring costs is a way to present a realistic picture of the different levels of investment required to support differing kinds of collective approaches, and to question assumptions as to how costly they really are, relative to humanitarian action more broadly.

### 2.1 Key drivers of cost

The cost of collective approaches can be broken down into core costs and costs related to common services.

#### 2.1.1 Core costs

There is a common consensus among respondents that coordination and information management (IM) personnel feature in almost all collective approaches. This also represents some of the largest associated costs. As one donor respondent explained, ‘collective feedback mechanisms aren’t very material-heavy ... it’s personnel, IM infrastructure and data collection apparatus’. In explaining the high cost of personnel, respondents reflected on the need for high-quality, senior coordinators or

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<sup>2</sup> A 2017 CDAC Network policy paper outlined a set of objectives that characterised a minimum viable model that focused on (1) facilitating two-way communication between aid actors and affected people; (2) ensuring affected people’s opinions are integrated into decision-making; and (3) ensuring communities’ information needs are met (CDAC Network, 2017). However, respondents for this study highlighted the need to elaborate more clearly what a ‘good enough’ collective approach would look like in practice. This issue is discussed in more detail in this project’s synthesis report (Holloway et al., forthcoming).

facilitators with the ability to wield influence with senior members of response leadership. This was deemed essential in order to ‘navigate the politics in terms of what could be shared [especially with] issues of confidentiality, fraud, corruption, harassment, or exploitation’, as one UN agency respondent explained. This profile attracts individuals with greater experience in managing such environments – and ‘more experience obviously costs money’ (UN agency respondent, 2020). In emergency preparedness settings or in contexts where governments play a leading role in a response, national coordinators able to develop good relationships with local government and civil society may be more important.

While it is well-recognised that personnel represent some of the largest costs for collective approaches, even these costs can vary substantially. This difference primarily depends on the type of coordinator employed. A national coordinator employed by an NGO in a preparedness setting has an estimated annual cost of \$35,000–50,000 per year. By contrast, an international UN coordinator in an internationally led emergency can cost at least six times as much: between \$240,000 and \$300,000 per year, due in large part to substantially higher salaries and additional benefits. These figures are indicative and do not represent the specificities of different contexts or individuals; however, they highlight the cost implications of using national versus international, or non-UN versus UN employees to coordinate or facilitate collective approaches. While these cost differences are significant, the main consideration should be who is best placed to fulfil a coordination role effectively in a context given the specific objectives of each response.

In addition to the coordinator role, IM personnel and associated infrastructure represent core costs in collective approaches. Respondents recognised a clear need for well-qualified IM staff who are capable of transforming large amounts of data into useful and digestible analysis for users and decision-makers. These IM positions can be particularly hard to recruit for, which can affect costs: ‘People who have the skills and understand humanitarian principles ... that’s tough and it’s expensive’ (INGO respondent, 2020). Again, these costs are

dependent on the use of national non-UN staff or international UN employees, with the former costing in the region of \$38,000 and the latter up to \$250,000.

Like strong IM staff, robust IM infrastructure helps to process feedback data for decision-making. It is well-recognised that there is a range of IM structures in use in collective approaches, ranging from simpler data management tools such as Excel or Google sheets to fully web-based databases and dashboards. Ultimately, the infrastructure developed is dependent on what is needed and the intended purpose of any dashboard and the data produced. As a result, the cost implications of this infrastructure can vary depending on the type of system in use and whether it can build on something existing or must be set up from scratch. Costs for IM systems used in collective approaches can therefore range from \$10,000–20,000 for annual renewal of software licenses and staff time, up to approximately \$100,000 for setting up a complex IM system from scratch. A more expensive example of such a system is the proprietary Sugar customer relationship management (CRM) system run by the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster and World Food Programme (WFP) in CAR. This system collects feedback and directs it to the relevant organisation and cluster as well as to the working group in an anonymous form for trend analysis (Barbelet, 2020).

Additional core costs relate largely to monitoring and evaluation (M&E) as well as overheads and administration. This is distinct from the response monitoring role that collective approaches often serve and focuses rather on the project cycle of the approach itself. In reference to core costs, M&E of the entire collective approach involves preliminary scoping work, such as situation analyses and information and communication assessments conducted at the onset of a crisis. These carry estimated costs of \$15,000–30,000 and may need to be repeated annually as contexts evolve. Where present, additional final or real-time evaluations cost in the region of \$50,000. Beyond this, there is little evidence of day-to-day M&E of the collective approach as a whole being specifically costed, although it may appear in the budgets of specific

common services funded within the approach. Depending on the model used, hosting and administrative costs associated with coordinating the collective approach may also account for up to 10% of total budgets.

### 2.1.2 Common services

In addition to core costs, collective approaches incur costs for the range of components and common services included in each model. A brief outline of these costs is included below, based on the budgetary data collected from proposed and actual projects as well as estimates from experts working in the sector. Unless otherwise specified, the costs represent spending over the period of one year.

#### Hotlines

Hotlines were cited as one of the most expensive components of collective approaches given their human resource intensity and need for telecommunications infrastructure. Start-up costs can be comparatively high, although these may be mitigated by the availability of pre-existing call centres that can be built out into a wider service. In Iraq, start-up costs for the first six months of a new hotline were \$318,000 (Ruppert et al., 2016). Once established, however, running costs are lower, with estimates from multiple contexts putting the annual cost of an established hotline in the region of \$300,000–400,000. For example, the Linha Verde 1458 hotline used in the Mozambique response was costed at \$370,000 per year. This includes the operational costs for running the call centre, the operators and call costs as well as personnel costs for the project manager and IM support officer and support costs for information, education and communication materials. A similar hotline in CAR was budgeted at \$330,000 per year.

#### Perception surveys

Perception surveys aiming to understand how affected populations perceive humanitarian responses were included in many of the budgets collected as part of this research project. For dedicated perception surveys, the data collected

costed this intervention at \$100,000–300,000 per year across different contexts, generally involving multiple rounds of data collection per year. Specific amounts are dependent on survey coverage, frequency and location. As a supplement or alternative to more comprehensive or frequent surveys that focus on accountability to affected populations (AAP), AAP indicators can be incorporated into annual multi-sector needs assessments that support the development of HRPs.<sup>3</sup> These show similar top-line costs, from \$80,000–100,000 covering the disaster-affected area from the 2018 Sulawesi earthquake, to \$300,000 covering 91% of districts in CAR in 2019.

#### Rumour tracking

Rumour tracking is another commonly utilised component of collective approaches to CCE. Working through and engaging with local media partners, NGOs help to address inaccurate information spreading in crisis situations. Costs can vary depending on the nature of the actor leading this component: international media development agencies with the associated international costs are likely to reach up to \$200,000 a year in multiple contexts.

#### Language and translation support

Beyond rumour tracking, respondents noted the importance of a language component in collective approaches to CCE. This intervention allows information to be delivered in the language of the affected population, increasing access to critical information about the response and essential services for those affected. Costs associated with this component can range from \$40,000 for a surge deployment to \$820,000 for a comprehensive annual budget for a country programme (including overheads).

#### Social mobilisers

Youth or local group engagement was cited by respondents as another element often included in collective approaches to communication and community engagement. Dependent on the

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3 In some instances, standalone perception surveys have also served as the data source for AAP indicators within an HRP.

groups involved and the extensiveness of those networks, this component has been costed at \$100,000–250,000 in budgets for collective approaches. In many cases these activities may be wrapped up with agency-level community engagement work and contributed as in-kind support for collective approaches rather than as a dedicated, standalone cost.

### Training

Training frontline staff in skills related to community engagement and collecting or responding to feedback was sometimes included in reviewed budgets. This cost varied widely from \$44,000–266,000 and is heavily dependent on the type of training delivered and the intended audience. For example, focal point training at a national level with a small number of participants is likely to attract fewer costs than field-based training that may include a larger number of participants.

## 2.2 Different models of collective approach

Data gathered for this study points to a relatively wide range of annual costs for collective approaches, from around \$200,000 to almost \$3 million. Using this as a basis, this section outlines hypothetical budgets for four types of collective approach ranging from minimalist to maximalist. While these budgets set out several activities under each approach, ultimately the type of approach and components used are dependent on the specificities of the context and the intended objectives of the response. For example, a

hotline or social media monitoring is likely to be less effective in a country with lower mobile phone ownership or internet penetration. In contrast, face-to-face feedback gathering or perception surveys tend to be included in a broader range of contexts as they are more universally applicable. Further considerations include the scale and duration of the crisis: a protracted and complex crisis is likely to require a larger-scale and more developed collective approach in line with a larger humanitarian response more broadly. Other factors, such as the type of leadership and existing local capacity may also play a role – a government-led response in a context with pre-existing social accountability mechanisms is unlikely to require a brand-new complaints handling service, for example.

It should be noted that collective approaches exist on a spectrum of costs and comprehensiveness, and the breakdown into different types provided here is for indicative purposes only. In addition, budgets do not capture the in-kind contributions of different partners in collective approaches, which are hard to cost but essential to their functioning (see further discussion in chapter 4).

### 2.2.1 Minimalist approach

Minimalist approaches (see Table 2) cost under \$0.5 million and tend to feature in comparatively small-scale, short-lived humanitarian responses such as the responses to the 2017 Hurricane Maria in Dominica and the 2018 Sulawesi earthquake in Indonesia. They tend to feature strong local governance with short-duration surge support for coordination capacity and common services, and are heavily complemented by the provision of in-kind support from agencies.

**Table 2: Indicative budget for a minimalist collective approach (six months)**

Budget line	Cost (\$)	Quantity	Total (\$)
<b>Human resources</b>			
Coordinator (NGO, six months) and information officer (NGO, three months)	85,000	1	85,000
<b>Components</b>			
Perception surveys	25,000	4	100,000
<b>Grand total</b>			<b>185,000</b>

**Table 3: Indicative annual budget for a medium-sized collective approach**

Budget line	Cost (\$)	Quantity	Total (\$)
<b>Human resources</b>			
Coordinator (P4, six months)	300,000	0.5	150,000
<b>Components</b>			
Coordination and capacity support (two months)	40,000	1	40,000
Language and translation support (two months)	40,000	1	40,000
Inter-agency hotline (12 months)	350,000	1	350,000
Support to local media	200,000	1	200,000
<b>Grand total</b>			<b>780,000</b>

### 2.2.2 Medium-sized approach

Medium-sized approaches (Table 3) cost in the region of \$0.5–1.5 million and may feature in larger sudden-onset natural hazard emergencies that scale up and down relatively quickly, such as Mozambique’s Cyclone Idai crisis; or medium-sized conflict settings such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)’s 2018 Kasai crisis. They are likely to feature a coordination role plus multiple common services, some provided as part of short-term surge support and some functioning on a more medium-term basis.

### 2.2.3 Maximalist approach

The maximalist approach (Table 4) is generally embedded within an extensive international response. In many cases it is UN-led, functioning in a large-scale protracted crisis, including a substantial range of common services. Examples include approaches implemented in CAR and Bangladesh, costing in the region of \$1.5–2.5 million per year.

### 2.2.4 Preparedness or governance-focused approach

This model (Table 5) has been developed by the CDAC Network and applied in multiple contexts to support collective approaches for CCE focusing on emergency preparedness. It aims to support locally led coordination platforms and combines a coordination role with a ‘flexible funding mechanism’ that is disbursed by the platform to support collectively identified priority projects. It also includes a dedicated national coordinator and IM/support officer for the national platform hosted by an NGO.

The overall cost of this model can vary substantially depending on its scale and scope. The flexible funding mechanism makes up the bulk of costs and can vary substantially in size depending on the focus and capacity of the national platform and its members. Hosting costs paid to the organisation supporting the

**Table 4: Indicative annual budget for a maximalist collective approach**

Budget line	Cost (\$)	Quantity	Total (\$)
<b>Human resources</b>			
Coordinator (P4)	300,000	1	300,000
IM officers	250,000	2	500,000
<b>Components</b>			
Preliminary assessment analysis	30,000	3	90,000
Common data analysis mechanism	100,000	1	100,000
Perception surveys	250,000	1	250,000
Support to local media	200,000	1	200,000
Monitoring and evaluation (5% of programme costs)	72,000	1	72,000
Administration costs to hosts (7% of overall costs)	105,800	1	105,800
<b>Grand total</b>			<b>1,617,800</b>

**Table 5: Indicative annual budget for a preparedness approach**

Budget line	Cost (\$)	Quantity	Total (\$)
<b>Human resources</b>			
National coordinator	50,000	1	50,000
IM/Support officer	38,000	1	38,000
<b>Components</b>			
Flexible funding mechanism*	226,000	1	226,000
<b>Support costs</b>			
Office, IT and communications, recruitment, staff training	21,000	1	27,000
In-country travel	12,000	1	15,000
Administration costs to hosts (7% of overall costs)	24,920	1	24,920
<b>Grand total</b>			<b>380,920</b>

\* The flexible funding mechanism is implemented independently in-country with common guidelines for financing locally led initiatives. In Bangladesh, it financed seven projects with a total budget of £550,000 (\$742,500). One such project through BBC Media Action was a national-level training curriculum to enable the delivery of basic communicating with communities training to national staff at scale (Tanner et al., 2018).

platform can also vary and can range from simple overheads to the implementation of specific actions on behalf of the platform. For example, the Shongjog platform in Bangladesh has a message library and media development landscape guide that require hosting by an organisation as well as continuous updating and support, which in some cases could be considered under hosting costs.

Together, these figures demonstrate that, while the costs involved in collective approaches might represent a substantial outlay of resources for a single agency or donor, they are small relative to the total cost of humanitarian action in a given context. At \$2.5 million, the budget for the collective approach in CAR included in the country's 2020 HRP submission was the most expensive reviewed for this study. Yet it accounts for only 0.6% of the HRP's \$400.8 million total funding requirements (excluding new requirements for Covid-19). Similarly, the entire requirement for both collective and non-collective CCE under the Communicating with Communities sector in the 2020 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya refugee response in Bangladesh accounts for just under 1% of the plan's total. To put this into context, guidelines from major humanitarian donors suggest that around 3–5% of all project budgets should be dedicated to M&E (DFID, 2019; USAID, 2019).

## 2.3 Costing collective versus non-collective approaches – a useful comparison?

This study did not have sufficient resources or access to data to conduct a cost–benefit analysis of collective approaches against non-collective, agency-level approaches. This section therefore outlines the claims that are commonly made regarding the relative costs and benefits of collective approaches, before discussing how far cost efficiency and cost effectiveness analysis are relevant in the comparison of collective to non-collective approaches. Throughout this discussion, it is important to note that, while cost efficiency gains are often cited as a collateral benefit of collective approaches, they are rarely, if ever, a core objective.

In general, the major claim for the potential for collective approaches to reduce costs is around reducing duplication. According to CCEI documentation, a collective approach 'improves efficiency by reducing duplications and sharing limited resources' (CCEI, 2017: 2; see also CDAC Network, 2019). The example often cited is the 2015 Typhoon Haiyan response, in which 17 single-agency hotlines were operating in parallel. Reducing these down to one single inter-agency mechanism should substantially lower costs, even if the resulting project were more expensive in

comparison than any of the 17 previously existing agency-level ones (CCEI, 2018a). This argument does not necessarily imply that collective CCE should simply replace agency-level mechanisms, but that it can support consolidation and efficiency savings where appropriate.

Another possible efficiency gain of collective approaches is their potential to increase the reach of quality CCE services across a response. Here, the issue is not just of too many agencies spending too much money on similar or duplicative activities, but of too few agencies having enough money to spend on their own CCE for it to be effective. Developing and testing communication materials, implementing perception surveys or running a functional hotline require a minimum level of investment, and smaller agencies with tight operating budgets may choose to spend their money on other forms of assistance that they perceive to be more effective (CCEI, 2018a; Tanner et al., 2018). Common services provided under collective approaches thus theoretically reduce the barrier to entry for such agencies to incorporate better CCE into their own activities, as well as expanding the range of potential entry points when doing so. At the same time, training or capacity support provided by collective approaches can allow smaller organisations to do more with their existing resources.

By contrast, the most common way in which collective approaches are perceived to add cost in comparison to agency-level approaches is in transaction costs (i.e. the additional burdens imposed by doing things collectively), especially around time. Several respondents for this study pointed out that coordination around common approaches can take more time than just moving forward at agency level – especially if coordination is badly run – due to the added level of complexity. This can be problematic in fast-moving situations where disagreements around common messaging delay sign-off and roll-out, or where common feedback and complaint mechanisms are not established until months into a new emergency. Conversely, other respondents argued that the cross-cutting nature of coordinating around CCE has the potential to generate a greater spirit of collaboration between agencies, thus supporting more efficient coordination in other parts of a response.

To date, there is no commonly agreed standard across the humanitarian system for comparing the costs of different programming models. The value for money framework developed by the former UK Department for International Development (DFID) – now the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) – is often cited as the most fully elaborated model (Stoddard et al., 2017). It looks at how programmes deliver money in terms of their economy (reducing costs of inputs), efficiency (cost per output) and effectiveness (cost per outcome). It also goes beyond this to incorporate questions of equity in terms of whether resources reach the most marginalised as well as the largest numbers of people (ICAI, 2018). Recent work by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in support of the Grand Bargain’s cash workstream has focused on developing more approaches for rigorous analysis of efficiency and effectiveness, and understanding what factors drive observed differences across programming (USAID and IRC, 2019).

In terms of how these lenses might be applied to collective approaches compared to non-collective approaches, there are a number of issues to consider. The most important is that, as the above collection of budgets shows, collective approaches cover a broad range of possible models and can look very different in different contexts. In terms of cost efficiency, attempting to compare entire approaches, either to each other or to non-collective approaches, is hard. In addition, many of the activities of collective approaches are additional or supplemental to those of agency-level CCE, seeking to supplement rather than replicate agency-level approaches. For example, ensuring that populations are not over-burdened, preventing disjointed messaging across agencies and informing inter-agency decision-making processes all imply additional costs related to coordination and IM that would rarely be incurred at agency level. Again, this can preclude efficiency analysis against non-collective approaches as there is limited basis for comparison.

By contrast, certain common services within a collective approach, such as hotlines or

perception surveys, lend themselves much more readily to cost efficiency comparisons as they produce similar outputs regardless of whether they are part of collective or non-collective approaches. However, it is also important to note that cost efficiency analysis says nothing about the quality of outputs, which is important in cases where better-resourced common services may be higher quality than their agency-level equivalents.

In theory, cost-effectiveness comparisons at outcome level should be more feasible. Establishing common outcome indicators and measurement approaches for response-level CCE could allow for comparison across different contexts on how far the presence of a collective approach contributes to these outcomes. In this respect, the ongoing development of a global Accountability and Inclusion Results Tracker to assess the performance of different humanitarian responses represents a promising avenue (IASC, 2020). Using perception indicators such as those developed by IASC for inclusion in multi-sector or standalone needs assessments that inform the development of HRPs could be another

option for tracking higher-level outcomes or impacts (IASC, 2018). However, establishing causality and attribution back to the operations of a collective approach is challenging given the variety of other variables in play.

Ultimately, more work needs to be done on determining what success looks like and how this can be measured at both process and outcome level, and for common services and collective approaches, in order to begin assessing cost-benefit more clearly. At the time of writing, IASC's Results Group 2 on Accountability and Inclusion was working on an Accountability and Inclusion Results Tracker. This may represent a promising next step for better and more standardised measurement options for collective approaches than those currently available. It is also important to remember that cost is only one measure of success, and that many of the objectives of both collective approaches and the common services they involve are driven by normative or ethical concerns rather than considerations of efficiency or value for money.

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# 3 The funding environment for collective approaches

At present, collective approaches to CCE often struggle to access resources and are reliant on a relatively small pool of donors. This section explores the implications of ongoing resource constraints for the ability of collective approaches to operate effectively and inclusively, before examining the donor landscape in terms of why and how donors do, or do not, support collective approaches.

## 3.1 Key issues in resourcing collective approaches

### 3.1.1 Resource constraints for both collective and non-collective CCE

Evidence from across this research project suggests that a positive feedback loop exists between agency-level CCE and collective CCE. Good-quality CCE at programme or agency level provides a strong basis for more effective efforts at collective CCE, while commitments to a collective approach can spark improvement in agency-level practices (Holloway et al., forthcoming). However, securing enough resources to implement CCE activities continues to be an uphill struggle for many agencies. Participants at CCEI-run regional workshops for both Latin America and the Caribbean and Africa widely reported struggling to access sufficient and predictable resources to implement CCE (CCEI, 2018a; 2018b).

Agencies will often mainstream CCE or AAP across budgets as a basic component of good programming. However, resources are harder to

secure for standalone activities. There are often unrealistic expectations either internally or on the part of donors that programme staff can balance implementing programming activities with more resource-intensive approaches to CCE. This tension is especially acute in the case of attempts to foster more meaningful two-way communication such as closing feedback loops or participatory programme design (Ruppert et al., 2016; CCEI, 2018b; Tanner et al., 2018). Compounding these issues, insufficient economies of scale and higher transaction costs mean that smaller agencies in particular may end up prioritising implementation over some elements of CCE as a more effective use of scarce resources (Tanner et al., 2018).

Many of these issues are also prevalent when it comes to resourcing collective CCE. Overall, a recent review of ‘Peer 2 Peer’ support missions to HCTs since 2014 found that ‘lack of funding for collective work is almost always raised’ as a barrier for collective approaches (Chatelet and Sattler, 2019: 7; see also Holloway et al., forthcoming). Efforts to implement collective approaches that depend on in-kind contributions of staff time or other resources have struggled to get off the ground as priorities shift, staff leave or expectations about who is meant to do what are not commonly established (Ford and Khajehpour, 2018). In rapid-onset crises, the time taken to secure and process dedicated funding can mean a collective approach misses the crucial first few months of an emergency.<sup>4</sup> In the cases of Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, the Kathmandu earthquake in Nepal and the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh, common

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that funding is not the only bottleneck in sudden-onset crises. Lack of incorporation of CCE into emergency preparedness planning is also a major factor.

services for CCE were not established until at least four months into the response (Austin and Bailey, 2014; Austin, 2016; Buchanan-Smith and Islam, 2018). Securing skilled coordination capacity has also delayed the start-up of collective approaches (Barbelet, 2020), which is partly linked to a lack of funding at global level. According to a 2018 CDAC Network study, global surge capacity for CCE coordination remains limited, even as ‘no donor interviewed had made available any additional ... to invest in attracting and developing new talent within this field, although they expected partners to deliver on this agenda’ (de Serrano, 2018: 6).

Collective approaches have also been hampered by short and sometimes unpredictable funding timelines, constraining their ability to provide influence across the humanitarian programme cycle (Ljungman, 2012; CCEI, 2018b; Barbelet, 2020). Actors involved in implementing collective approaches highlighted the tendency of this short-term funding model to leave their programming stuck in start-up or ‘pilot’ mode, making failure a foregone conclusion in cases where projects required a certain degree of scale or buy-in to succeed. Where emergency funding is secured in the early stages of an emergency, it is often not sustained in the medium term. This diverts attention from programme implementation to a process of perpetual fundraising. It also prevents the consolidation of collective approaches, in some cases leading to the abrupt shutting-down of activities while a crisis is still very much ongoing.

There have been promising recent developments in terms of addressing some of the bottlenecks described above. The emergence of the Humanitarian to Humanitarian (H2H) Network – a membership-based funding platform with an explicit focus on common services for CCE – has offered one potential avenue for rapid resourcing of key aspects of collective approaches within weeks rather than months of an emergency. The network has taken on an increasingly important role in funding start-up costs for collective CCE since 2019, especially in emerging or smaller crises. Most recently, it has supported a two-part effort to systematically establish a new collective approach to CCE as part of the growing

humanitarian response in Burkina Faso, building on an initial scoping study (CDAC Network, 2020) to provide a package of common services.

For certain activities, such as inter-agency hotlines, there also appears to be an increasing willingness to commit funding early and for longer durations: while the Iraq inter-agency call centre struggled with inflexible, limited funding when it was established in 2015, it has become easier to fund in successive years. More recent efforts at resourcing similar projects in Afghanistan and Mozambique have been much more straightforward (Lancaster, 2019; Lough et al., 2020). Indeed, the collective approaches in CAR, DRC and Mozambique that were reviewed under this project were eventually supported by significant financial resources, even if these resources took substantial time to come online, or were not always configured in the right ways to maximise the complementary strengths of their different parts. In this respect, a minority of respondents felt that resource constraints were becoming less of an issue. However, the majority view of respondents for this study reflected the literature in emphasising a narrative of ongoing funding scarcity, especially in smaller or ‘forgotten’ crises where fewer resources are available across the board (Tanner et al., 2018).

### **3.1.2 Challenges of sustainability and preparedness**

Given the initial investment of both time and money required to set up collective approaches, several respondents highlighted the relatively limited scope for them to sustainably phase out or transition to preparedness work in the current coordination and funding landscape. This problem is especially relevant in natural hazard-related disasters where humanitarian activities scale down relatively quickly. In some cases, such as the Philippines and Indonesia, collective approaches established in emergency settings have evolved into communities of practice. These tend to function on the basis of in-kind contributions of members rather than dedicated funding support. However, as discussed above, this is contingent on members’ shifting priorities, risks a loss of momentum and direction over time and can be especially ‘draining’ for smaller or local organisations with fewer resources to spare

(Arevalo, 2019). Integration with government-led approaches such as disaster management structures or national feedback mechanisms has been suggested. However, this remains an extremely challenging proposition for collective approaches established in emergency settings: securing meaningful government involvement is often takes years and requires specific capacity and skills – something that is generally far beyond humanitarian funding horizons. In a worst-case scenario, collective approaches risk simply evaporating when funding runs out, with major implications for the loss of institutional memory and wasted investment in the event of future crises. As one UN respondent explained in the case of Haiti:

Once the [2010 earthquake] emergency response was wrapping up, nothing was left. I went there after [2016] Hurricane Matthew looking at these coordination aspects, no one even remembered the old approach and this was supposed to be one of the first examples of working collectively.

As a consequence, there was broad consensus among respondents that dedicated resources were needed to support some form of collective approach that functions during ‘peacetime’ between major crises in contexts vulnerable to conflict or natural hazard-related disasters. Its role in such periods would be to consolidate lessons learned, support national CCE capacity development, facilitate effective CCE in the event of smaller emergencies, strengthen emergency preparedness and foster links with government actors. This echoes the wider findings of this study, where lack of adequate preparedness was found to be major limiting factor in the effectiveness of collective CCE in rapid-onset emergencies (Holloway et al., forthcoming).

In some instances, donors have explicitly committed multi-year humanitarian funding to collective CCE for emergency preparedness.<sup>5</sup> In these cases, collective approaches have been established explicitly as long-term preparedness activities rather than being transitioned from short-term approaches established during emergencies, thus avoiding some of the issues related to humanitarian scaling-down described above. However, respondents generally reported that humanitarian funding for CCE as a preparedness activity was extremely difficult to secure in an environment where donors are already having to perform triage between different emergencies amid spiralling funding requirements. This was compounded by the fact that many donors remain unfamiliar with CCE or view it as a ‘nice to have’ activity (see further discussion below).

Several respondents therefore highlighted the need to explore alternative sources of development funding such as government donors’ development arms, the World Bank or national multi-donor trust funds. Here, they felt that there was more space to explore how collective CCE could play a role in supporting collective outcomes in the so-called ‘nexus’ between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors.<sup>6</sup> However, to date there have been very few clear examples of collective approaches receiving support from development-focused funding streams. One exception is Nepal, where the collective approach established after the 2015 Kathmandu earthquake received funding to support the development of the country’s UN Development Assistance Framework. The Nepal Resident Coordinator’s Office also chose to retain a national coordinator focused on CCE preparedness after project funds for the post-earthquake collective approach expired at the end of 2018.

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5 These include the DFID-funded Disasters and Emergencies Preparedness Programme (DEPP), which supported national platforms for CCE in Bangladesh, South Sudan and the Philippines between 2014 and 2018, and an ongoing project funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) that supports national platforms in Fiji and Vanuatu.

6 Collective outcomes have been highlighted as an organising principle of efforts to operationalise the humanitarian–development–peacebuilding ‘nexus’ that has been prioritised in the wake of the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. They have been broadly described as efforts toward ‘sustained positive change, in particular avoiding future need for humanitarian intervention, for example through the reduction of vulnerability and risk’ (Fanning and Fullwood-Thomas, 2019: 13).

### 3.1.3 Support to local actors

There has been a growing awareness in recent years of the links between CCE and locally led humanitarian action. The 2018 humanitarian accountability report highlights local actors as key enablers of the participation of affected people in humanitarian decision-making, since they have ‘the knowledge, cultural understanding, linguistic capabilities, and access to crisis-affected populations that international actors often lack – and they will be there long after international actors leave’ (CHS Alliance, 2018: 32). However, evidence from this project suggests the participation of local actors in collective approaches is uneven. While collective approaches do often involve local actors, they are rarely locally led (El Taraboulsi-McCarthy et al., 2020; Dewulf et al., 2020). Top-down, internationally led collective approaches may often exist in parallel to more bottom-up local approaches, with only limited overlap between the two (Holloway and Fan, 2020).

Constraints around funding can limit local actors’ engagement in collective approaches to CCE in several ways. At a basic level, national and local organisations are generally less able to access international funding compared to INGOs and UN agencies (Development Initiatives, 2019). In the case of smaller organisations, participation in collective approaches without additional dedicated resources may represent too great an opportunity cost (i.e. organisations may feel the benefits of diverting scarce resources to CCE may be outweighed by spending the same amount on other programming). HPG research on collective approaches in the DRC Ebola response found a close relationship between local organisations’ participation in CCE coordination and the presence of active funding for CCE activities (Dewulf et al., 2020). By contrast, efforts to include a national co-chair of the Communication with Communities Working Group for the Rohingya response in Cox’s Bazar foundered in part due to lack of funding (Buchanan-Smith and Islam, 2018).

The determining influence of ‘money as power’ (Fast and Bennett, 2020: 17) may also contribute to constraints on less well-resourced local NGOs leading collective CCE.

As discussed below, there is a wider tendency for collective CCE to be financed through intermediaries due to the small size of the grants involved. This is disproportionately true for local organisations, which either lack the relationships and expertise to access bilateral funding opportunities where they do exist, or simply have smaller funding requirements that are proportional to their size or scope of activities. Intermediary grants – especially those provided by UN agencies – tend to be slow, inflexible, impose exacting screening and due diligence requirements, and offer lower overheads to local NGOs (Stoddard et al., 2017). In the context of collective CCE, this can both stifle innovation (Austin and Bailey, 2014; McClelland and Hill, 2019) and limit the complementary potential of more holistic, less project-focused ways of working that are characteristic of many community-based organisations (Balibuno et al., 2020). Most local NGOs would not be eligible to directly access H2H grants,<sup>7</sup> cutting them off from a key emerging funding source for collective CCE that specifically aims to address some of the speed and efficiency bottlenecks inherent in intermediary funding. Similarly, local organisations are unable to access the UN’s Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), which is exclusively available to UN agencies.

In response to some of these bottlenecks, DEPP set up funding mechanisms within national CCE platforms. These were aimed at allowing those platforms to collectively allocate flexible funds to support ‘locally led’ CCE initiatives. However, in the absence of explicit guidelines that funding should be channelled to local organisations, the majority of grants were ultimately awarded to INGOs. While an evaluation of these funding mechanisms found that they could, with adjustments, provide a powerful tool for strengthening local involvement

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7 H2H funding is focused on supporting organisations that provide specialised common services to other humanitarian actors rather than to affected populations. As a consequence, most local organisations struggle to meet the criteria for membership since this is rarely their primary focus. While in theory a local organisation could be admitted to the H2H Network if it met eligibility criteria and passed due diligence checks, the network’s membership was in practice exclusively composed of INGOs at the time of writing.

in collective CCE (Tanner et al., 2018), they have yet to be implemented outside of DEPP. Another possible route to higher quality funding for local organisations is via OCHA-managed country-based pooled funds (CBPFs), which explicitly prioritise supporting national NGOs. However, as discussed in chapter 4, this source remains relatively under-used to date.

## 3.2 The donor landscape

This section focuses on the role of donor governments in funding collective approaches (the role of intermediary donors such as UN agencies is discussed in chapter 4). It examines which donors are currently supporting collective approaches, before looking at how the characteristics of donors and collective approaches intersect to determine if and how collective approaches are funded and supported.

### 3.2.1 Comparatively few donors are engaging systematically around collective approaches

While many donors now expect to see evidence of how their partners' programming will contribute to participation and accountability objectives, relatively few explicitly fund collective approaches to CCE in any systematic way. Prior to its incorporation into FCDO, DFID had been the most directly engaged government donor and provided extensive support to coordination platforms and common services for CCE across a range of contexts over the past decade. At present, it also remains the sole contributing donor to the H2H Network. The extent to which the newly formed FCDO will continue DFID's role as a leading donor in this space remains unclear. At the global level, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)'s Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) has also provided support to collective CCE through its funding to the CCEI, but channels resources for this purpose exclusively through UNICEF and is less engaged in terms of direct support to CCE at country level. On a smaller scale, DFAT has taken an increasing interest in supporting collective approaches in the Asia Pacific region with an emphasis on preparedness. Beyond this, a small number of government

donors and private foundations, including European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC), have supported collective approaches at field level in a handful of contexts, which has helped make the case for collective or common services, but they are not necessarily engaged in supporting collective approaches at a strategic level across their portfolios.

### 3.2.2 Donors differ in their understandings of both CCE and collective approaches

Reflecting a wider finding of this research, donors do not generally share a common language when discussing issues related to CCE, and the concept of a collective approach does not appear to be widely understood. Indeed, some donors contacted for this study were initially reluctant to engage as they did not see how collective approaches to CCE related to their portfolios – even as their funding supported projects contributing to collective approaches in different settings, or to wider accountability objectives. When asked to describe how they understood the idea of a 'collective approach', donors interviewed for this study varied in their responses from detailed explanations of what the objectives and structure of a collective approach should look like, to much broader definitions focused more on mainstreaming accountability across responses, and meeting commitments to initiatives such as the Grand Bargain or the CHS.

In the absence of a common understanding of what a collective approach should look like or achieve, donors have differing priorities and areas of focus when engaging with issues that fall under the umbrella of collective CCE. One common emphasis is on processes that fulfil an ombudsman role, such as complaints hotlines set up to uncover and address issues of malpractice within the system. This aspect of CCE has received substantial attention since the 2018 '#AidToo' scandal of sexual abuse within the humanitarian sector. Another focus is on the role that CCE can serve as part of M&E for humanitarian programming, with tools like feedback mechanisms and perception surveys used to check whether responses are

providing effective, value-for-money services that include the most vulnerable. CCE practitioners interviewed for this study argued that such understandings are overly instrumental and focus on the needs of humanitarian actors rather than handing over more power to affected people. As one INGO respondent working on CCE programming explained, ‘It’s not our job to be the eyes and ears of donors, but of communities ... The world is bigger than the humanitarian system and the community has other ideas in their head beyond improving the humanitarian system for us’.

Ultimately, the low level of sensitisation about what collective CCE is or should look like creates a challenging environment for ensuring predictable or consistent funding. This is likely to lead to different collective CCE activities being funded in line with different donors’ fragmented priorities rather than the needs of the collective in a given context. It also places a substantial burden on CCE practitioners in terms of the effort they must devote to awareness-raising and fundraising.

### **3.2.3 Scale and organisational culture are important determinants of how far donors engage with collective approaches**

Differing levels of engagement in collective approaches are also related to questions of scale. Larger donors with extensive, multi-sector portfolios have greater motivation to support strategic, response-wide processes such as collective CCE, since doing so is more likely to yield impacts in terms of the programmes they fund. By contrast, smaller donors may focus more on supporting a specific set of partners, geographic areas or sectoral niches. In such cases, they may not see spending money on activities that have (or appear to have) only tangential relevance to their programming focus as the best use of their limited resources.

In addition to portfolio size and focus, capacity is another important consideration. Collective approaches to CCE can be complex relative to the amount of resources they require to operate. While some donors have enough technical capacity to support field-level design processes and develop detailed business cases, this may not be possible for others with a lighter

staffing footprint. As one donor explained, ‘with the World Humanitarian Summit and Grand Bargain, there are a lot of new workstreams coming up, all of which are important, but to be very honest we have to think about capacity and how we prioritise’.

Organisational culture and ways of working also have a bearing on donor engagement. The fact that collective approaches are not commonly understood across the humanitarian system has specific implications in cases where donors decentralise much of their decision-making to regional or country level. In these circumstances, engagement is likely to be patchy – some field offices may be heavily involved in funding collective CCE, while others may be entirely unfamiliar with it. More broadly, donors may vary in how far they are prepared to take an active role in setting funding agendas. Coupled with increased commitments to providing non-earmarked or soft-earmarked funding in line with the Grand Bargain’s Workstream 8, this may mean that some donors’ support to collective CCE is only as strong as that of their partners. In the case of some donors, uptake of collective CCE may be slow where priorities and attitudes around what is important are firmly established. As one respondent explained, ‘we have this complex mechanism that we have put in place, and we tend to think that it’s not perfect but we are addressing the main issues ... Change is something that doesn’t happen easily, and even if you point to some really staggering gaps, unless it’s something that’s caused by a scandal, the action will be very slow’.

### **3.2.4 Concerns over efficiency and risk influence whether and how collective CCE is funded**

The imperative among donors to demonstrate accountability to their taxpayers has significant implications for whether and how collective CCE is funded. The lack of a strong evidence base makes it hard to demonstrate how collective approaches are good value for money or the best use of resources, and was cited by several respondents as a barrier to securing funding. At present, there is little data available on how far collective approaches to CCE lead to better outcomes for affected populations.

While CCE indicators are increasingly being included in response-wide multi-sector needs assessments and in tracking implementation of HRP or community perception surveys, attributing shifts on these metrics to the presence or absence of a collective approach is extremely challenging given the number of competing variables involved (and especially since most responses that use perception surveys also tend to feature a collective approach). At the same time, budgets for collective approaches are already small, meaning the amount that can be invested in M&E and learning as a reasonable proportion of their total is limited. There is no agreed set of indicators in place to track how far collective approaches are achieving their stated objectives; where evaluations exist they tend to focus heavily on processes and learning rather than outcomes. If donors are not already convinced that collective CCE is important from a normative or rights-based perspective, convincing them to fund it remains an uphill battle. As one UN respondent explained, ‘It has always been “show me the results – if you can’t show evidence that programme adaptations added to people’s happiness, then don’t waste our time”’. However, as practitioner respondents noted, this attitude places extremely high expectations on CCE practitioners, rather than strategic and operational actors with the power to directly change how aid programming is delivered (see van Praag (2020) for a further elaboration of this argument).

Beyond evidence, respondents flagged a number of additional characteristics of collective approaches that may make them unpalatable for some donors. First, collective approaches may take time to mature given the complexity of the relationships involved and the sometimes-slow process of securing buy-in from key stakeholders. This is especially true where there are efforts to involve national governments. Moreover, the work of collective approaches is not always especially visible and does not lend itself to being tracked by the kinds of output-focused metrics favoured by some donors.

These issues clash with the expectation from some humanitarian donors that programming shows ‘quick wins’ or demonstrable evidence of steady progress. Second, several practitioner respondents highlighted the need for collective approaches to evolve more organically in response to evolving contextual dynamics and understandings of what does and does not work. This is difficult when faced with the ongoing limited availability of flexible funding resulting from overly rigid compliance rules. Third, the fact that costs for activities covered by collective CCE are heavily geared towards human resources is reportedly an issue in the face of a persistent attitude among some donors that high spending on staffing costs imply less aid getting through to affected people.

Considerations of efficiency and risk also have an impact on what funding mechanisms are used to support collective approaches. An accumulating set of concerns related to counter-terrorism, fraud and aid diversion, and sexual exploitation have tended to lead many donors to tie their funding to extensive requirements around due diligence, reporting and compliance (Stoddard et al., 2017), substantially increasing transaction costs related to bilateral funding. Also, because donors tend to have limited staff capacity to spread between administration and strategic engagement, there is a widespread trend towards disbursing larger grants to run fewer projects. At the same time, there is often a perceived lower risk involved in funding larger NGOs and UN agencies. This is related to both robust compliance procedures as well as ‘staying power’ resulting from greater access to resources and, in the case of UN agencies, their organisationally mandated presence in emergencies. By contrast, collective approaches tend to cost relatively little, while also requiring multiple small grants to both large and small agencies to ensure they maximise their complementary roles. As a consequence, the transaction costs and risks<sup>8</sup> associated

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8 In general, risk aversion here refers to the generalised due diligence concerns that inhibit direct funding of smaller and local organisations more broadly (Stoddard et al., 2017; Barbelet, 2019), rather than specific risks posed by collective approaches. However, one donor respondent did highlight reputational risk in terms of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) or aid diversion complaints being handled through donor-funded common feedback mechanisms. Here, they outlined the challenges and complexities of if and how such complaints should be passed on from implementors to donors given competing concerns around confidentiality and independence.

with directly funding collective approaches are disproportionately high from a donor perspective. As one donor put it:

Costs for a feedback mechanism are rarely significant enough to make it worth a separate grant agreement, unless you have a partner that already has a due diligence agreement in place. So it's really difficult to fund small amounts, because of all the admin procedures and the same amount of work [as for a larger grant].

This means that donors who do fund collective approaches tend to rely heavily on intermediaries such as UN agencies or pooled funding mechanisms to do so. The implications of this are discussed in greater depth in the following chapter.

### **3.2.5 The consequences of low donor engagement**

The relatively limited number of donors currently funding and engaging with collective CCE limits opportunities for strengthening and deepening these approaches in a number of ways, beyond simply starving them of resources. First, it means that opportunities for burden-sharing are relatively limited. Both globally and at response level, collective approaches have been funded largely or wholly by a single donor. Globally, this means that momentum behind collective approaches is heavily dependent on the continued engagement and interest of FCDO and a small number of other partners, which is problematic in the event of a change of political priorities at these agencies. This is also a problem

at response level – again, if a donor reorients their priorities and stops or draws down funding, this leaves any approach vulnerable to collapse. Here, CCE actors may struggle to secure funding in cases where donors stipulate matching contributions from other funding sources as a condition for their support. From a political standpoint, a collective approach funded by a single donor may lead other actors to view it as an extension of that donor's agenda rather than for the collective good, which may sometimes be problematic in the charged environments of humanitarian coordination.

A lack of donor engagement also poses broader challenges for both collective action within an approach and its ability to secure widespread buy-in within a response. In cases where donors adopt a more hands-off approach when delegating their support through intermediaries, there is a risk that these intermediaries may, if unchecked, co-opt or dominate the approach in ways that stifle effective collaboration. More broadly, donors have a potentially powerful role to play in bolstering collective approaches, whether in terms of ensuring integration between their implementing partners' agency-level accountability work and the collective, or advocating for stronger links between collectives and strategic decision-making by response leadership. However, if donors have no funding stake in the collective approach or are not at least sensitised to how it can add value to a response, this advocacy role may go largely untapped, leaving the collective approach with limited political support behind the scenes.

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# 4 Types of funding for collective approaches

How a collective approach is resourced can have substantial implications for how it functions. The modality and configuration of funding can determine how quickly an approach can be deployed, how effectively it can secure buy-in from different actors, how inclusive it is and how far it supports collective action. Each approach has different strengths and weaknesses and there is no single solution best placed to support collective approaches. Funding for collective approaches needs to consider a number of trade-offs, such as independence versus strategic influence and links to programming, or speed and flexibility versus sustainability and buy-in. This chapter provides analysis on how collective approaches are currently resourced and gives overview data and in-depth examples from different contexts. It goes on to explore the strengths and weaknesses of different funding modalities in terms of their ability to support an effective collective approach.

## 4.1 How are collective approaches to CCE resourced?

In order to better understand how collective approaches are resourced, this study carried out a secondary data review of collective approaches implemented across different responses since 2015. This was based largely on status updates for national CCE platforms issued by the CDAC Network (CDAC Network, 2020) and was supplemented by other agency literature and FTS data. Based on the classification system proposed

by Humanitarian Outcomes (Stoddard et al., 2017), funding modalities used to support CCE in each response were categorised as:

- Bilateral funding (funding directly from donor to implementing agency).
- Bilateral grant intermediary funding (donor funding sub-granted through an intermediary actor, generally UN or INGO).
- Global pooled funds (funding disbursed by mechanisms paid into by multiple donors at global level, including CERF as well as non-UN funding vehicles such as H2H and the Start Network).
- CBPFs (funding disbursed by OCHA-managed pooled funds paid into by multiple donors at the country level).

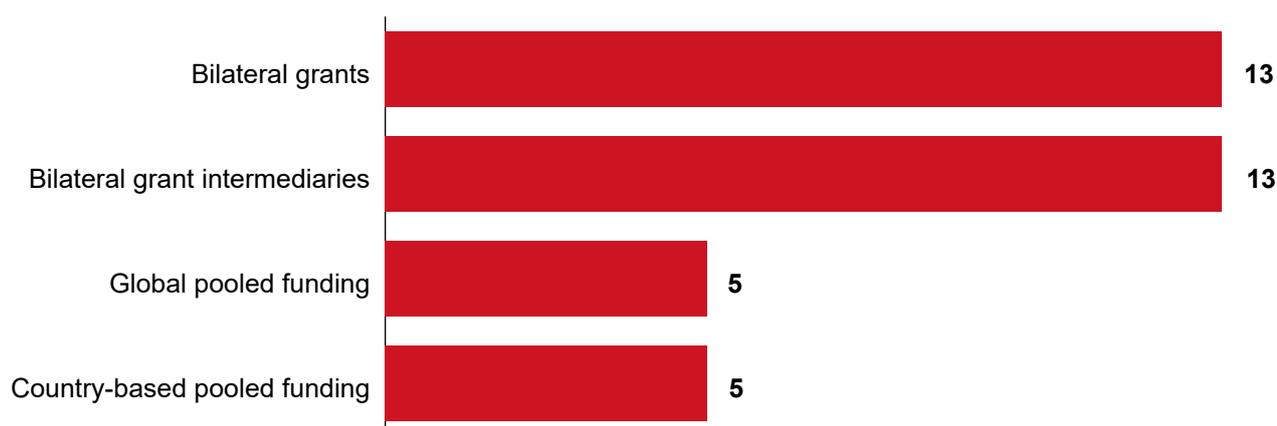
This analysis is intended to provide an overview and is not necessarily comprehensive. The somewhat fluid nature of collective approaches means the distinction between what activities are and are not part of the approach is not always clear. Especially in the case of UN support to collective approaches, it has also not always been possible to distinguish between bilateral grants and in-kind resources supported by non-earmarked contributions or core funding. In-kind support in terms of staff time and other resources has not been included in this analysis since it is assumed to be present in virtually all collective approaches.

Overall, the study analysed 20 contexts in which collective approaches to CCE were reportedly used (see Figure 3).<sup>9</sup> Of these, it found that direct grants were used in 13 contexts, with

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9 Afghanistan, Bangladesh (nationwide), Bangladesh (Rohingya response), Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo (Ebola), Democratic Republic of Congo (Kasai crisis), Dominica, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Kenya, Mozambique, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Vanuatu and Yemen.

**Figure 3: Number of collective approaches supported by different funding modalities**



funding for project implementation flowing directly from donor governments to UN agencies in 11 cases and to INGOs in five. Bilateral grant intermediaries were also used in 13 contexts. UN agencies served as intermediaries in nine contexts and INGOs in seven. UN agencies have generally served in a leading intermediary role during crisis settings, while INGOs have done so largely in CDAC-supported preparedness programming. By contrast, global and country-based pool funds were comparatively under-used. Global pooled funding mechanisms were used in five contexts: Mozambique, Papua New Guinea, the DRC Kasai crisis in the case of CERF, and the DRC Ebola crisis, Dominica, and Mozambique again in the case of H2H.<sup>10</sup> CBPFs were also only employed in five contexts: Afghanistan, the Central African Republic (CAR), the DRC Kasai conflict, Iraq and Yemen. Out of all approaches, only the Nepal Common Feedback Project was able to secure multi-year funding in a disaster or post-disaster setting. By contrast, CDAC-supported preparedness programming was funded across multiple years across five different settings.

Collective approaches tend to be supported by a variety of different funding modalities at one time. In many cases, bilateral funding from a donor government will be received by a UN agency, which will then implement some activities directly (mainly coordination) while also serving as an intermediary, sub-granting activities to international or local NGOs. Funding for different activities within a collective

approach may also be more or less tightly linked – at one extreme, as in Nepal, almost all funding for the collective approach was channelled through the Resident Coordinator’s Office and sub-granted out to partners. By contrast, the approach in Mozambique was looser, involving different activities supported by bilateral grants and global pooled funding, operating with greater or lesser degrees of coordination between them. Box 1 provides an in-depth outline of how a sample of different collective approaches have been resourced.

## 4.2 Options for resourcing collective approaches to CCE

This section explores different funding modalities for collective approaches from the perspective of their strengths and weaknesses. It outlines how each modality helps or hinders these approaches, as well as how it intersects with key issues in the funding landscape.

### 4.2.1 Support through agencies’ own resources (resources in-kind and non-earmarked funding)

In-kind contributions are a necessary bedrock of any collective approach. Contributions of staff time in particular can be critical in establishing collective approaches where no dedicated funding is present, especially at the start of sudden-onset crises or in smaller

<sup>10</sup> CERF supported part or whole of collective approaches in Mozambique and Papua New Guinea. H2H supported collective approaches in Dominica, DRC (Ebola) and Mozambique.

## **Box 1: Resourcing of collective communication and community engagement in different contexts**

### **Bangladesh – locally led approach in a preparedness setting**

The 'Shongjog' initiative in Bangladesh served as a collective approach to CCE focused specifically on emergency preparedness. While a communication with communities working group had existed in Bangladesh since 2012, it was given new impetus by a substantial injection of multi-year funding through DFID's DEPP project. Unlike many other collective approaches, the UN did not play a leading role in soliciting or channelling funds. The DEPP itself was funded as a consortium: the CDAC Network served as the global project lead and funds were sub-granted to BBC Media Action, which hosted the project in Bangladesh on CDAC's behalf. However, decisions around how funds were used in Bangladesh were made by a multi-member core group chaired by the government's Department of Disaster Management. Under this initiative, the core group collectively identified gaps requiring new programmatic interventions, solicited and reviewed proposals and decided on most appropriate partners. Following these decisions, BBC Media Action disbursed sub-grants to identified partners. This separation of fund management and decision-making reportedly helped foster a stronger spirit of collaboration between Shongjog members. Following the conclusion of DEPP in 2018, Shongjog has continued to function as a coordination platform through in-kind contributions from its members – although it no longer provides funding.

### **Central African Republic – comprehensive approach in a protracted crisis**

A coordination platform on AAP was established in CAR in 2016 but remained largely dormant for several years due in part to funding constraints. By 2019, the platform was able to secure funding from both bilateral and pooled sources for a comprehensive package of activities functioning as part of an integrated overall design. Much of the group's 2019–2020 funding was provided bilaterally by DFID and Sida to UNICEF, which directly implements coordination and serves as an intermediary passing this funding to other specialist agencies implementing different components of the approach. In addition, the CAR CBPF provides funding for complementary CCE activities run by WFP through the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster, as well as supporting REACH to implement the response-wide multi-sector needs assessment, which monitors key AAP indicators as part of the humanitarian planning cycle. The approach has been further strengthened by the ability of larger members to fundraise independently and provide in-kind resources. For instance, WFP has used non-earmarked HQ funds to provide in-kind Sugar CRM software licenses so that CCE partners can provide data to an interagency common feedback platform.

### **Indonesia – light-touch approach in a sudden-onset emergency**

In the wake of the Sulawesi earthquake, tsunami and liquefaction in 2018, a collective approach was established by the HCT to support a largely government-led response. OCHA and UNICEF provided in-kind staffing capacity to coordinate a Community Engagement Working Group (CEWG) and deliver information services such as feedback bulletins and databases. Data feeding into these mechanisms was provided as an in-kind contribution by CEWG partners. Coordination capacity was short-lived and the information services it supported wound down as soon as it ended six months after the emergency. To institutionalise lessons learned, efforts were made to set up a longer-running community of practice supported by in-kind contributions of staff time from the actors involved. It should also be noted that a large number of local organisations already mainstreamed CCE into their activities and worked closely together with only limited engagement with the international humanitarian system. This represents an alternative, bottom-up model of a collective built around a collaborative spirit that was able to function in spite of a lack of dedicated funding for collective CCE.

### **Mozambique – medium-sized approach in a sudden-onset emergency**

The collective approach in Mozambique in response to cyclone Idai in 2019 was relatively well-resourced for a full year following the emergency. This was thanks to an effective combination of rapid short-term support from global pooled funding mechanisms, giving way to more sustained bilateral support during early recovery. The deployment of in-kind support from OCHA, coupled with grants from

## Box 1: Resourcing of collective communication and community engagement in different contexts (continued)

H2H and CERF meant that common services and coordination activities under the approach were up and running within weeks rather than months. UNICEF then used non-earmarked funding to continue supporting subnational CCE coordination after OCHA and H2H-supported CDAC surge staff ended their deployments, while DFID agreed to take on supporting an interagency hotline for a full year as part of a bilateral agreement with WFP once initial CERF funding for the project was exhausted.

### Nepal – comprehensive approach in an early recovery setting

The core of the inter-agency Common Feedback Project (CFP), established after the 2015 Nepal earthquake, was supported by bilateral DFID grants to the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO). Time taken to process this initial grant meant that the CFP was slow to set up. However, following a six-month pilot, DFID committed to a further two years of funding. This stability allowed the project to develop an extended strategy to support early recovery activities, as well as respond to smaller crises that occurred during the project's lifetime. The decision to channel funding through the RCO as a neutral entity rather than a lead UN agency with an operational mandate helped ensure the CFP's independence and buy-in from other actors in the response. The CFP was also a tightly integrated funding model for a collective approach, with almost all resources for collective activities channelled through the CFP and sub-granted or contracted to its members for further implementation. Once established, the CFP was also able to draw in supplementary funding from other sources, including a non-humanitarian grant from the UN Development Group. Following the end of the DFID grant, the RCO committed to resourcing a national position from its operational budget to continue supporting CCE for emergency preparedness.

'forgotten' crises. In some cases this may take the form of dedicated staff – for example, OCHA regional CCE specialists have been instrumental in establishing collective approaches in Mozambique<sup>11</sup> and Indonesia. In other cases, agencies may lend or second staff from their own programming to support collectives (for example, see Holloway and Fan, 2020). More broadly, collective approaches in almost all contexts rely on support from agencies active in service delivery, whether in terms of contributing to coordination platforms, disseminating information to affected populations, or providing entry points to common feedback or complaints mechanisms.

A small number of UN and alliance respondents for this study felt that any discussion on funding collective approaches to CCE needed to be situated within wider advocacy for more resources for agency-level CCE, as well as better integration of agency-level and collective systems. In particular, they highlighted the need to balance a focus on

independence in collective CCE with support for strong links between CCE and service delivery at agency level. They also felt that some of the dysfunctions collective CCE is trying to address – such as weak collaboration around messaging or failure to develop functional referral pathways for complaints – could be fixed more effectively by resourcing agency-level CCE more comprehensively. In this respect, they felt that a genuinely collective approach was more likely to emerge from healthy working relationships between competent actors than from separate structure imposed from above. As one explained, 'if agencies can get their own houses in order and get their procedures on referral sorted, then that can sort out inter-agency ways of working, and this can be as efficient as trying to do everything in a common way. So this becomes less about equipment and "stuff" as it is around processes and information-sharing'.

However, evidence from this study and elsewhere highlights that attempts at collective

11 In Mozambique the CEWG was established jointly by an OCHA staff member supported through OCHA's own funds and a CDAC specialist supported by an H2H grant.

CCE that are entirely reliant on in-kind contributions tend to be heavily dependent on the efforts of individual champions and can be highly vulnerable to staff turnover or inter-agency politics. They also risk excluding smaller, local actors, on whom in-kind support imposes higher opportunity costs. Depending on stronger agency-level CCE to solve collective outcomes would thus ultimately require a change in incentives and accountability for CCE within larger organisations, as well as wider cultural shifts toward greater transparency and collaboration, particularly on the part of UN agencies. It would also require much greater transfers of resources and power to local organisations. In the medium term at least, there will likely be an ongoing need in most contexts for a balance between better-resourced agency-level CCE and independently funded collectives.

One avenue mentioned by a number of respondents for supporting both agency and collective CCE was to earmark proportions of programme budgets for CCE activities. While this is widespread practice in the case of M&E, it is rarely seen in the case of CCE (although in many organisations aspects of CCE such as feedback gathering may be included in M&E budgets). At agency level, some respondents felt this would be an effective lever for donors to both support better quality CCE among their partners and to demand clearer accountability for its implementation. Those in favour of this approach felt it was necessary in an environment where too many actors still see CCE as optional, although others were opposed on the grounds that it risked reducing CCE to a set of standalone activities or processes, rather than mainstreaming it effectively across programming. At collective level, some respondents suggested that lead agencies could agree on a common commitment to allocate a percentage of their budgets to collective CCE, drawing on non-earmarked or headquarters funding where necessary. They argued that doing so would have the three-fold advantage of ensuring predictable funding for collective CCE independent of

uneven donor interest; ensuring buy-in by making sure more actors had a financial stake in the collective approach; and stimulating greater donor engagement through leading by example, or ‘walking the walk’.

#### 4.2.2 Bilateral funding

Straightforward bilateral funding from donors to projects implemented by a single partner with no further sub-granting rarely forms the core of a collective approach. Most commonly it supports common services for CCE functioning at some degree of scale. In responses where collective approaches are not present, these services may represent the next best thing, supporting collective outcomes such as common access to feedback or two-way communication on response-wide concerns. In some cases, bilaterally funded common services may end up forming the building blocks for a wider collective approach as it develops: in South Sudan, Internews’ long-running bilaterally funded humanitarian programming has helped form the basis for the growth of a revitalised community engagement working group involving a wider range of actors (South Sudan CCE Working Group, 2019).<sup>12</sup> Bilateral funding also allows partners who have relationships with specific donors, for example private foundations, to bring funding into a collective in ways that would otherwise be impossible. Conversely, it offers a straightforward way to engage donors who are only interested in one specific aspect of a wider collective approach.

However, on its own bilateral funding does little to support collective action: accountability is primarily between donor and partner, rather than between partners and the collective. Similarly, bilaterally funded projects may struggle to impact the wider humanitarian response unless they are run by a powerful agency, supported by an influential donor, or integrated into response-wide accountability structures in other ways, such as inclusion in HRPs or sector strategies. For example, a Red Cross feedback platform run during the DRC

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12 The working group in South Sudan also builds on the foundation of earlier work on collective CCE implemented through the DEPP project in 2014–2017.

Ebola response<sup>13</sup> worked hard to share data as a common service for the response as a whole, but struggled to gain traction due to perceptions that it was an IFRC-owned system. While it may be possible for a collective approach to be stitched together from a set of independent, bilaterally supported projects, this involves substantial transaction costs for donors – if funding multiple partners independently – and the partners involved, and was highlighted as the least-preferred funding model by several respondents. Due to donor risk-aversion discussed above, access to bilateral funding is also likely to be limited to UN agencies and INGOs.

One example of where bilateral grants have worked well to support common services for CCE with response-wide buy-in and influence is the case of inter-agency call centres. In Mozambique, the centre was funded by a bilateral grant from DFID to WFP. Although the new call centre struggled with buy-in, uptake was helped by WFP's presence as one of the largest and most influential actors in the response. DFID also proactively advocated on behalf of the hotline among its own partners and across the wider response. From an early stage, the hotline was also formally endorsed by the HCT and integrated into strategic documents by the Protection Cluster. Similar models have been rolled out in Iraq and Afghanistan. In these latter cases, hotlines have not only been bilaterally supported, but have served as unusual vehicles for burden-sharing between donors, securing funding from both UN intermediaries and CBPFs concurrently.

### 4.2.3 Bilateral intermediary funding

As discussed above, reduced risks and transaction costs have often resulted in donors supporting collective approaches by funding multi-actor consortia through an intermediary lead agency. In acute crisis settings, these consortia have overwhelmingly been led by UN agencies, which have also served as the focal point for coordinating the collective approach. Respondents discussed the potential advantages to this approach. Having a single agency in charge of both coordination and funding can in theory strengthen coherence within collectives,

ensuring that gaps are filled and that different partners fulfil complementary roles. Coupled with this, having a UN agency as a lead can be beneficial because they may be able to mobilise more buy-in for a collective approach from both humanitarian coordination systems and government authorities due to their political clout. In addition, UN agencies are often better placed to fundraise on behalf of collectives as they can usually mobilise more funding from a wider variety of sources relative to other actors, and present an attractive option for donors looking to minimise risk.

However, several respondents highlighted concerns over the risk this funding model poses to the neutrality and independence of collective approaches. The fact that agencies leading collective approaches also have specific operational mandates may risk skewing the focus of the collective approach toward that mandate. In Mozambique, a UNICEF-led community engagement working group was felt by some stakeholders to be overly focused on health (one of UNICEF's core programming areas in the country), alienating partners with other programming focuses (Lough et al., 2020). In some cases, there may also be a lack of separation of powers within lead agencies between collective approaches and agencies' own CCE programming. In CAR for example, budget decisions for the UNICEF-led collective approach rested with UNICEF's Communication for Development programme rather than with the staff coordinating the approach (Barbelet, 2020). More broadly, tying a collective to a single lead agency in contexts where political tensions exist between agencies can hamper its effectiveness; for example, in Bangladesh an International Organization for Migration (IOM)-led collective approach has had to navigate wider inter-agency tensions between IOM and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR).

As a corrective to the issue of neutrality, several respondents highlighted the possibility of channelling funding through UN entities without a specific operational mandate. Here, the decision to situate the Nepal CFP within

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13 The programme was a collaboration between the DRC Red Cross, IFRC and the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

the RCO was identified as a successful way to maximise its legitimacy and reach – although bureaucratic processes make channelling funding through RCOs to partners a complex task, especially if they are not registered in-country. Another relatively under-explored option was funding collectives through the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS), which specialises in programme management but lacks a sector-specific operational mandate. UNOPS has implemented inter-agency hotlines in both Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as global-level common services like the Centre for Humanitarian Data, but has so far not been involved in implementing a wider collective approach.

Linked to questions of neutrality, there was a common critique among non-UN respondents for this study that funding collectives through UN operational agencies fosters a top-down, hierarchical model of collaboration by concentrating too much power in the hands of a single, already powerful actor. Structurally, having the same agency responsible for strategic coordination and decision-making over funds risks creating an unequal power dynamic that blocks collaboration. Some NGO respondents funded by UN organisations reported being treated more like subcontractors providing services, rather than as equal partners in the collective approach. They felt this was indicative of a wider internal culture within large UN agencies that tends to be uncomfortable with relinquishing control, highlighting a range of issues related to lack of willingness to work collaboratively on project design, lack of transparency around budget management and funding decisions, and a need to control narratives. As one INGO respondent summarised, ‘it’s hard for big agencies ... to actually be collaborative, to distance themselves from their own mandate, to set up systems that aren’t “controlled”, in which everything that goes through has to be signed off and vetted by the agency rather than the collective’. This reflects findings from HPG’s study of

the collective approaches in the DRC Ebola response, which noted that:

‘UNICEF’s role as a neutral facilitator was greatly challenged by its role in funding and implementing RCCE activities. As a financial intermediary, the co-lead on the RCCE and a significant operational partner, UNICEF was perceived to have created a ‘monopolistic situation’ (Dewulf et al., 2020: 30).

It is important to note that these power dynamics do not always preclude collaborative ways of working; however, they do leave them heavily dependent on the good faith efforts of specific individuals (Barbelet, 2020).

As a result of these issues, some respondents felt that funding collectives through NGO-led consortia offered agencies involved in providing common services for CCE a greater degree of independence in terms of determining programming priorities and agenda-setting within the wider response. Similarly, routing funding through NGOs is seen as a way to reduce the dominance of the agendas of UN agencies in collective approaches and fostering more locally led collective action.<sup>14</sup> This logic contributed to the decision to fund national CCE platforms via NGO hosts in the DEPP programme.

However, as with other funding models, sidelining UN agencies entirely does risk the ability of NGO consortia to effectively plug into UN-dominated humanitarian leadership and coordination structures unless complementary approaches can be found to secure buy-in. This is potentially less of an issue in preparedness programming or in contexts with strong government leadership, where power and legitimacy are less tightly tied to positioning within the international humanitarian architecture.

#### 4.2.4 Global pooled funds

Two global pooled funding mechanisms are currently available to fund collective CCE: the

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14 This assumes a lower level of risk tolerance among NGO intermediaries compared to UN donors, which may or may not hold true depending on the specific organisation involved.

UN CERF and the H2H Network.<sup>15</sup> Pooled funding mechanisms at the global level have two clear advantages over bilateral funding. First, they represent the main option for getting dedicated funding in place quickly in rapid-onset emergencies, with the ability to disburse grants within weeks rather than months of a new crisis. Second, they represent an opportunity for burden-sharing among multiple donors, mitigating the common issue of CCE being over-dependent on a single source of support. By contrast, a major downside of both mechanisms is the short-term nature of their support – CERF funds must be spent within six months, while H2H funding timelines may be as short as three months.

The two funds target different sets of partners: CERF is accessible to UN agencies only, while H2H is a membership network specifically supporting NGOs that provide common services to other humanitarian responders. In theory, this could allow for complementary support to different actors within a collective approach during a rapid-onset emergency: in Mozambique both CERF and H2H funds were deployed in parallel to support different common services for CCE in the wake of Cyclone Idai. However, any such complementarity would depend on effective collaboration among actors on the ground, as ensuring a joined-up approach from different funding sources is always likely to be challenging in the early stages of a crisis. In Mozambique, the alignment of CERF and H2H took place largely by chance, as there was no formal coordination between the actors involved in submitting respective proposals.

CERF funding is dependent on prioritisation of CCE by HCTs. This can function as a double-edged sword: on the one hand, the collective nature of the CERF prioritisation process should in theory guarantee any CERF-supported CCE activities a degree of buy-in within the coordination structure. On the other hand, competition for limited resources and ongoing

perceptions that CCE is ‘nice to have’ may see it edged out in favour of activities perceived to be more urgent, especially given the fund’s stated aim of addressing ‘highest-priority, life-saving needs’ (CERF, 2018: 10). This may account for the fact that CERF has only supported collective approaches in three contexts to date (DRC Kasai, Mozambique and Papua New Guinea). Since the CERF only provides funding directly to UN agencies, it also raises many of the same challenges as bilateral support provided through UN agencies, shutting out smaller and local NGOs from direct funding.

In contrast to CERF, supporting community engagement and accountability is part of H2H’s core mandate, although it emphasises the provision of common services rather than a collective approach. As such, one of its strengths is its ability to ensure that new crises have access to a predictable menu of services for collective CCE from experienced technical partners, including coordination, perception surveys, language support, and information services. It also provides direct funding to smaller, more technically focused organisations that lack access to core funding. As such, H2H serves as a means to bypass lengthy proposal development and contracting procedures of bilateral donors or UN intermediaries that would otherwise hinder deployment in the early stages of a crisis. It also works to ensure complementarity between the activities of its members, aiming to deploy different service providers as part of an integrated package rather than as a series of individual projects. Finally, it aims to secure the backing of lead agencies within humanitarian coordination structures in order to ensure buy-in and uptake for the services on offer.<sup>16</sup>

However, H2H membership currently is made up exclusively of INGOs based in the global North. Working through these tried and tested technical agencies supports predictability and theoretically provides quality control, but does

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15 Currently the H2H Network is only supported by a single donor, but is seeking to expand its donor base and is hence categorised here as a pooled fund. While the Start Network was mentioned as a possible source of global pooled funding, it has not thus far provided dedicated funding to collective CCE. This is linked to its strategic prioritisation of local humanitarian action and emphasis on AAP as a mainstreamed way of working underpinning its entire approach, rather than as a standalone technical activity.

16 H2H activations supporting collective CCE in Mozambique and DRC were respectively agreed with OCHA and UNICEF.

relatively little to strengthen local capacity and ownership of collective CCE unless these agencies explicitly include this as an objective in their programming. Without other measures in place to ensure greater local participation, this risks generating a scenario where new or scaled-up collective approaches become dominated by the same INGOs, with local organisations once again reduced to a supplementary role. As one respondent asserted, the risk is of ‘ringfencing money for agencies because they exist, not because they’re good’.

#### **4.2.5 Country-based pooled funds**

CBPFs were highlighted by a large number of respondents as being especially well-suited to supporting collective approaches. In addition to supporting burden-sharing in similar ways to global pooled funding mechanisms, CBPFs were felt to have specific advantages. First, the close alignment of CBPFs with the humanitarian programme cycle means that any activities they support are more likely to secure buy-in and to be well-integrated into humanitarian responses. CBPFs aim to support priorities targeted within HRPs, and funding allocations are the result of decisions by country-level review committees that encompass a wide variety of actors ranging from donors to local NGOs. Collective approaches funded through CBPFs were thus seen as more likely to be contextually grounded, collaborative design processes, relative to other funding modalities. Second, CBPFs are able to fund non-UN agencies directly. In some respects, this represents the best of both worlds, in that CBPF-funded programming is rooted in and derives legitimacy from the humanitarian coordination architecture but is not subject to the constraints that can characterise funding

through UN agency intermediaries. Third, CBPFs are also established with a strategic commitment to support national NGOs. As such, they provide a possible avenue to foster greater inclusion of national organisations within collective approaches, as well as releasing them from the power dynamics that sub-granting from UN agencies or INGOs may imply.

Supporting collectives through CBPFs comes with its own set of challenges and has only been achieved in a limited number of contexts. Examples include supporting inter-agency hotlines in Afghanistan, Iraq and Yemen, as well as funding for wider aspects of collective approaches in CAR and DRC Kasai. As with CERF, CBPF support for collective approaches depends on a pre-existing understanding and commitment on the part of senior response leadership regarding the value of collective approaches. Moreover, while decision-making processes for fund allocation are theoretically inclusive, they can in practice be subject to the influence and interests of larger agencies, limiting their impact as a bottom-up design tool. Further, the bureaucratic hurdles these processes impose mean that funding may experience extensive delays and can be excessively inflexible (Barbelet, 2020). The funding timeline of CBPFs is also relatively short, with projects often running for only six to nine months and hardly ever multi-year (Featherstone et al., 2019). This again limits their value as a predictable mechanism to support more strategic, medium-term development of approaches. Overall, a recent evaluation of CBPFs warned that optimism over the types of issues that they can potentially resolve risks them becoming ‘over-burdened with expectations’ relative to the power and resources at their disposal (Featherstone et al., 2019: iii).

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# 5 Conclusion

Even a decade after collective approaches to CCE were first piloted, many still struggle to secure sufficient, good quality funding. In rapid-onset emergencies, funding for new approaches often takes time to come onstream, limiting their effectiveness in the crucial early stages of a crisis. Even in protracted crises, resource-starved approaches may take years to fully come onstream or gain traction. Common services feeding into collective approaches may be entertained as innovative pilots, but often struggle to secure enough funding to operate at scale and for a long enough period of time to meaningfully influence the quality of responses as a whole. The lack of reliable medium-term funding also inhibits consolidation and strategic planning, as well as the ability to effectively scale down or make critical links with emergency preparedness activities as crises shift towards early recovery. All these issues sit within a wider context of limited funding for non-collective CCE at agency level. This is especially important given the potential for positive reinforcement between agency and collective CCE.

A key finding of this study is that, regardless of the form they take, collective approaches to CCE are comparatively cheap when viewed as part of the total funding requirements of a given response. While the absolute costs of coordinating and delivering collective approaches may appear high compared to a single agency-level project or programme, in relative terms they represent only a tiny fraction of spending on humanitarian crises. As a cross-cutting effort aiming to strengthen humanitarian responses as a whole, they generally make up well under 1% of the total budget of annual HRP or equivalent appeals.

While the amounts required are not large, attracting funding for collective approaches is

not straightforward. Although they have been implemented across multiple contexts, collective approaches are not well-understood among government donors and the current donor base is small. For some, CCE is seen as a secondary priority to ‘lifesaving’ humanitarian assistance, or viewed as a niche technical activity beyond their core areas of focus or capacity to engage. Donors may also understand collective approaches through different lenses – for example, through a watchdog or an M&E role – that affect their view of what the objective or emphasis of such approaches should be, and hence what components they are willing to support. Positioning is also important here – as a cross-cutting, response-wide process, collective approaches may resonate more with larger donors that are strategically engaged with broad portfolios, compared with those that are smaller, more hands-off or support a more limited set of programming. Critically, the relatively small funding requirements of different activities under collective CCE means that transaction costs for bilateral grant funding are high, and donors may prefer to fund through intermediaries rather than directly. As elsewhere, this dynamic is likely to leave local actors at the bottom of the funding chain.

One key barrier to funding is a lack of evidence regarding the effectiveness of collective approaches. At one level, they play a role in reducing duplication, and expanding access to quality common services is common sense. This is widely accepted for equivalent approaches such as joint needs assessments.<sup>17</sup> However, there is clearly space for actors implementing collective approaches to do more to document, share and learn from if and how such approaches lead to improvements in aid delivery. Nevertheless, as with many other aspects of humanitarian response, proving how collective

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17 The narrative for the Grand Bargain's Workstream 5 on improving joint and impartial needs assessments asserts that such needs assessments are a means to reduce ‘duplication, wasted resources, and putting a burden on affected populations’ (IASC, 2020).

approaches directly improve the lives of crisis-affected people is extremely challenging due to the complexities of measuring impact. In this respect, it is important that collective approaches are not held to a higher standard than other cross-cutting aspects of humanitarian action such as coordination and M&E. Ultimately, it is also important to recognise that collective CCE is a means to support rights-based commitments such as those outlined in the CHS, the Grand Bargain, IASC commitments on AAP and elsewhere. The arguments for funding them are therefore moral as well as utilitarian.

How collective approaches are funded can be an important factor in contributing to, or detracting from, their ability to achieve their objectives. The modality and configuration of funding can determine how quickly an approach can be deployed, how effectively it can secure buy-in and how far it supports local actors and collective action. Different funding modalities all have various strengths and weaknesses, and to an extent the most appropriate funding approach will be heavily dependent on the context, scale and design of the collective approach. In this respect, there is a clear need to combine mechanisms that can deliver funding rapidly in the event of rapid-onset crises, coupled with more stable medium-term funding in protracted crises or during early recovery periods. This study suggests that pooled funding mechanisms at both global and country level have strong potential to support collective approaches, both as means to engage a wider range of donors and facilitate burden-sharing, and to facilitate more collaborative, inclusive approaches. However, to date they remain relatively under-used.

## 5.1 Recommendations

The following recommendations offer ways to strengthen the resourcing of collective CCE in ways that maximise its effectiveness.

### 5.1.1 To donors

- Coordinate to agree on a shared understanding of the minimum viable components of a collective approach. In IASC responses, the upcoming release of

a Collective Accountability and Inclusion Framework to guide HCs and HCTs should provide a clear blueprint for this.

- Based on this understanding, coordinate to ensure that coherent collective approaches – and not just cherry-picked components – are funded predictably, at sufficient scale, with medium-term, flexible funding.
- In new crises, support rapid scale-up of collective CCE:
  - Expand support to the H2H Network.
  - Develop bilateral strategic partnerships with key CCE actors at global and national level.
- Support funding models that strengthen collective action, support neutrality and avoid concentration of power:
  - Channel funding through actors without specific operational mandates, such as the H2H Network, RCOs or UNOPS. In all cases, the strengths and limitations of different intermediaries should be considered in terms of how they align with the objectives, type of programming and actors to be supported.
  - Build on the flexible funding mechanism approach piloted by the CDAC Network, where coordination and budget-holding functions are separated, funding is held by a neutral actor and priorities and funding decisions are set out by the collective.
- Support more local ownership of collective approaches. This could include:
  - Requiring and funding national co-chairs in any supported coordination platforms.
  - Supporting intermediary mechanisms that prioritise local actors, such as collectively managed flexible funding mechanisms or CBPFs.
  - Demanding greater subsidiarity from CCE practitioners providing specialist services, and prioritising agencies with a strong track record of local partnership.
- Ensure that collective CCE processes are embedded across the continuum of preparedness, response and early recovery/development:
  - Link funding for preparedness platforms in vulnerable contexts with specific

mechanisms for surge and scale-up in the event of emergencies.

- Support national CCE communities of practice.
- Work through inter-donor forums such as the Grand Bargain and the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative to advocate for more coherent and consistent support for collective CCE.

### **5.1.2 To H2H fund managers**

- Make funding available to local actors, whether by proactively recruiting national and local NGOs as member organisations, or by building requirements to support local capacity into membership criteria and funding activations.
- Consider extending funding timelines to ensure more systematic phase-out and handover of surge capacity.

### **5.1.3 To Humanitarian Coordinators and Humanitarian Country Teams**

- Advocate for adequately resourced collective approaches, in line with the mandatory responsibility to develop a collective approach to AAP laid out in the standard HCT terms of reference:
  - Use the IASC’s upcoming Collective Accountability and Inclusion Framework as a basis to develop and fundraise for collective approaches.
  - Ensure that a costed collective approach, linked to well-defined objectives and indicators, is included in HRPs as standard.
  - Push for the inclusion of collective approaches as part of prioritisation exercises for CERF and CBPF allocations.

### **5.1.4 To UN lead agencies**

- ‘Walk the walk’ by allocating a dedicated proportion of funds to both collective and agency-level CCE, drawing on unearmarked funding to do so in the absence of donor commitment.
- Establish a firewall between budgets for collective CCE and agency-level CCE activities, in order to ensure the neutrality and independence of collective approaches.
- When handling funds on behalf of collectives, support transparency and foster a more collaborative spirit by involving all stakeholders across the programme cycle, from design through to evaluation phases.

### **5.1.5 To actors designing and implementing collective approaches**

- Build in mechanisms to monitor and document how collective approaches impact decision-making within humanitarian responses as standard in all collective approaches.
- Coordinate to sensitise donors on collective CCE and its role in improving humanitarian responses. This should include efforts to streamline terminology and ensure consistent messaging around what collective CCE is, what its objectives are, how it links to system-wide commitments and reform processes and how it can add value in different types of context.
- Conduct mapping of donors at global and country level to better understand how different donors’ priorities and interests intersect with collective approaches. Based on this, explore how these priorities can be leveraged to support complementary aspects of a collective approach. This could involve breaking down different components of a collective approach into ‘menus’ that donors can choose to support in accordance with their specific areas of focus.

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