Fanning the Flame:
The CDAC Network –
A Movement for Change
The CDAC Network is a cross-sector collaboration, bringing together a diverse group of organisations, including humanitarian and media development organisations and technology providers. The key principles of collaboration and partnership underpin the way Network Members work together to respond to the challenges facing humanitarian action, as emergencies increase in magnitude and complexity.

The aims of the CDAC Network are that:

- Affected communities are better able to access life-saving information, voice their needs, ideas and feedback, and make informed decisions about their immediate recovery.
- Humanitarian practitioners and organisations are better prepared and able to provide life-saving information and communicate with crisis-affected communities, enhancing the effectiveness of their response.
- The humanitarian system has the capability to ensure that communication with affected communities becomes a predictable, consistent and resourced element of disaster preparedness, response and recovery, including through the use of innovative technology and partnerships where appropriate and cost-effective.

Current Full Members of the CDAC Network are: ActionAid; BBC Media Action; Development and Humanitarian Learning in Action (DAHLIA); the ICRC; International Media Support (IMS); Internews Europe; IOM, Merlin; OCHA; Plan UK; Save the Children; Thomson Reuters Foundation; Translators without Borders; UNFPA; UNHCR; UNICEF; United Methodist Communications; WFP; and World Vision International. Current Affiliate Members are: Fdl Development; FilmsAid; First Response Radio; Freesplay Energy; Ground Truth; PECOJON International; Social Impact Lab; and HFCC-International Broadcasting Delivery.

For more information and for other Network resources please go to www.cdacnetwork.org or follow us on Twitter @CDACNetwork.

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Rachel Houghton, Director, CDAC Network

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### The Story So Far

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‘The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.’

Aristotle (384BC-322BC)
Foreword

On joining the CDAC Working Group, as it was called in 2011, I found myself surrounded by a talented group of passionate and inspiring individuals committed to a vision of a very different humanitarian future, and with the courage to think differently.

This vision remains powerful because of its simplicity. It proposes that those affected by crises should be treated with dignity and humanity. Ultimately their right to self-determination should be respected and supported through the coordinated provision of relevant and timely information, and the opportunity to participate in dialogue with aid providers. It also proposes that the humanitarian sector should be considerably more responsive to the real needs and priorities of those it seeks to support, acting more as enablers and facilitators of communities’ own responses.

Imagine yourself in the midst of a city shattered by an earthquake. What you would want to know? With whom and how would you like to connect? Who could make the most appropriate decisions about how to put your life back together? Time and again communities express their need for relevant and timely information so they can make choices for themselves, as well as their need to be heard and to engage with humanitarian responders. But how to consistently meet these basic rights and needs remains a challenge.

Addressing these types of questions is at the core of what holds this group – now the CDAC Network – together: a shared vision of supporting disaster affected communities to be more resilient and empowered through information and communication.

While this vision remains strong, how to achieve it and what the CDAC Network should be and do has always sparked debate amongst our diverse group of Members. As such, the Secretariat has often found itself navigating a complex path through a set of contradictory views, whilst trying to find a balance between facilitative leadership and coordination in supporting the group to make sense of its experiences and embark on joint action.

As we start 2015, there can be no doubt that the CDAC Network is going from strength to strength. Membership has doubled since 2011, and funding from the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) is putting us on course to achieve the key development (DFID) is putting us on course to achieve the key

Why is it important to capture the story so far? I believe there are three main reasons:

1. We need to learn how to maximise our collaborative advantage from the diversity of the CDAC Network membership because multi-stakeholder and cross-sector collaborations are still relatively new delivery mechanisms, and we need to understand how to do this better.

2. Using this format to capture the story so far is particularly important in the context of a diverse group of people and organisations, and enables us to weave a thread and give meaning and structure to seemingly independent and sometimes contradictory opinions and events.

3. There are a number of questions associated with working collaboratively that have been hanging around in the background of the CDAC Network for some time and that deserve to be addressed. What is the real added value of our networked approach? Does it lead to greater innovation and sustainability? What is the appropriate amount of time spent on process and partnership building without wasting resources we could otherwise spend on programme delivery? Do the risks, discomforts and transaction costs outweigh the hoped-for benefits?

As with any new initiative, there have been and continue to be a number of challenges at the heart of the CDAC Network. But it is important that we ask these questions so we can get our ‘action’ right.

The timeline of this paper is 2009 to autumn 2014. Because of the limited time available to conduct interviews and write the study, a decision was taken to interview individuals from the original founding organisations who were instrumental in setting the CDAC Network up, as well as a small number of people from organisations which have been consistently active in the Network since a meeting early in March 2011. This was when the Working Group took the decision to re-brand as the CDAC Network. Inevitably we have not been able to include everything; this is a summary and a snapshot rather than a definitive history. Moreover, the challenges and contradictions as well as the successes and achievements are included, as there are things to be learnt from both our successes and ‘mistakes’.

I hope that this case history will be of interest to a range of stakeholders: CDAC Network Members; potential Members; sector partners; donors; and those worldwide who are interested in understanding the benefits and challenges of multi-stakeholder collaboration and networked ways of working.

The author, Ros Tennyson, has an insatiable curiosity about cross-sector partnering and a global reputation that spans more than 20 years in this field. She has trained, and continues to support, the Secretariat team in building its capacity to operate as a ‘brokering unit’, central in helping to shape and support our Members.

Colleagues will know that I am a great believer in cross-sector collaboration, and I believe that the cross-sector collaboration at the heart of our Network is game changing. But such collaboration always takes conscious effort and deliberate work. It will continue to be essential to demonstrate conclusively that collective action has more impact than single agency or single sector responses. This is because working at the edge of difference – and spanning traditional organisational boundaries – is challenging, as we have to balance different organisational cultures, business models and mandates. But it is also a tipping point where magic can happen: new questions are asked and answered, new collaborations and partnerships built; new solutions tried; and importantly, risks and benefits shared.

The ability of individuals and organisations to work interdependently is at the heart of our ability to address one of the humanitarian sector’s most pressing problems. This synergy remains at the centre of what the CDAC Network is, and what propels it forward to tackle new challenges to make real our vision to improve the lives of those affected by disasters and crises.

Rachel Houghton
Director, CDAC Network
November 2014
Network Timeline

2009

- Decision taken by Working Group to deploy to Haiti
- First formal meeting of the Inter-agency Working Group on Affected Populations Communication at British Red Cross in London, convened by British Red Cross & Save the Children, led to formation of the group's Steering Committee

2010

- Consultant hired to write draft strategy & define work plan for the Inter-agency Working Group on Affected Populations Communication
- First CDAC Coordination team created in Haiti

2011

- Meeting at NCVO in London to discuss CDAC 'global'
- First CDAC Network Secretariat Officer hired (May)
- Launch of the CDAC Network website (Mar)

2012

- First CDAC Network Steering Committee (Apr)
- Consultation held on the topic of Humanitarian Financing, led by OCHA (May)
- First CDAC Network Secretariat staff member (Research & Learning Office) hired (May)

2013

- Launch of the CDAC Network Foundation (Nov)
- Publication of the CDAC Network case history (Feb)

2014

- CDAC Network Members meet at the first Member's Council to discuss upcoming projects & strategic issues
- Creation of Common Needs Assessment tools, in partnership with ACAPS & IFRC
- Launch of new CDAC Network website, developed in partnership with Thomson Reuters Foundation (Jul)

2015

- CDAC Network, in partnership with Internews US, hires a Roster Manager to manage the development of the Humanitarian Communication & Media Roster
- Launch of new tools for Accountability to Affected Populations

2016

- CDAC Network Members collaborate for Iraq Needs Assessment (Aug)
- CDAC Network Members collaborate for Iraq Needs Assessment (Aug)
- Launch of new tools, including 'First Six Weeks of a Response' & a working paper on CwC & Accountability

Note: The timeline is a graphical representation of key events and milestones in the development of the CDAC Network. Each event is labeled with a date and a brief description of its significance. The timeline includes major project initiatives, policy developments, and organizational changes that have shaped the network's growth and impact. The timeline is designed to provide a visual overview of the network's evolution from its inception to the present day.
The Story So Far...

The Initial Impulse

"Not allowing ourselves simply to rush into delivery but spending time on developing our strategy and learning frameworks as well as on the collaboration process has been extremely important... CDAC has been systematically and successfully fanning the flame of people wanting to do something radically different." - Leigh Daynes, former CDAC Network Chair.

In March 2009 a group gathered in a pub in New York following the launch of a landmark paper at the United Nations (UN).

The individuals came from different types of agency including international nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), the UN, and media development organisations. This diversity is... and remains... significant. Some of those present were deeply shocked at how peripheral communication with affected communities had been in the response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004; whilst others were distressed by the disconnectedness between projects and agencies doing good things, but with limited apparent impact. What they had in common was a shared passion for communication as central to relief response and recovery, to greater self-determination, and to the building of resilience for those affected by and faced with disaster.

This discussion provided the spark that became the CDAC Network.

Leigh in the Dark was written by Lisa Robinson and Imogen Wall, both integral to the CDAC Network from the beginning. Its central thesis was that whilst humanitarian agencies were increasingly effective and coordinated in distributing food, water, shelter and medical help to people affected by disasters, they were failing to provide essential information that was desperately wanted and needed. Those affected by disasters faced considerable additional stress and anxiety because they lacked information critical to their recovery and survival.

The authors’ main recommendations were that communication with affected populations should be mainstreamed, and that individuals should be given specific roles and responsibilities for understanding and responding to the information and communication needs of disaster-affected people.

The CDAC initiative – at first an informal working group – officially launched in April 2009 following a meeting convened by the British Red Cross and Save the Children in London, attended by around 40 people representing more than 25 agencies.

Haiti Earthquake

In January 2010, soon after the group’s second Steering Committee meeting, which included a detailed discussion around how to collaboratively manage responding to a disaster, the devastating earthquake in Haiti struck.

‘Haiti became a hugely defining and successful part of the story of the Network. OCHA was persuaded to re-allocate some funding to CDAC’s work in Haiti, this was critical. Internews, as the only CDAC Member with an office in Haiti, was persuaded to take on the coordinating role, despite little previous experience of coordination. The Internews team was extraordinary; it just knew how to engage people in their own solutions rather than the more usual approach of telling people what to do. The CDAC experience in Haiti changed everything and gave the CDAC Network profile at the highest level. We now had proof of concept.’ - Imogen Wall, independent consultant.

An outcome was the formation of the Steering Committee for Haiti, which included a detailed discussion around how to collaboratively manage responding to a disaster, the devastating earthquake in Haiti.

The letters inviting participants to the meeting stressed the importance of better and transparent ‘two-way communication’ to ensure accountability to, and the participation of, affected populations; achievement of programme goals such as information education and behaviour change communication, and improved public information.

The meeting explored issues around information as a form of aid, communicating with communities as a means of accountability, and a need to distinguish between communication and ‘the media’.

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Not allowing ourselves simply to rush into delivery but spending time on developing our strategy and learning frameworks as well as on the collaboration process has been extremely important... CDAC has been systematically and successfully fanning the flame of people wanting to do something radically different.

The Haiti experience and the CDAC Network stepped up to help by providing a system-wide communication and coordination mechanism, bringing together humanitarian and media development organisations, local media and representatives of the Government of Haiti, in a collective effort to get life-saving information to affected populations and to channel the affected population’s voices back to aid providers. The initiative was funded largely through OCHA’s Emergency Relief and Response Fund (ERRF) with some additional short-term core funding in 2011 from the global CDAC Network and the World Health Organisation to support a cholera awareness campaign.

‘In my view, Haiti saved CDAC two years of meetings. Although it was sometimes chaotic... CDAC came out very well – not many organisations did. The follow up, when the job (and the funding) was over, proved more problematic. CDAC Members were in very different places.’ - Oliver Lacey-Hall, OCHA.

The Haiti earthquake and International Media Support (IMS) joined soon afterwards.

CDAC Haiti coordination team was formed to provide a system-wide communication and coordination mechanism, bringing together humanitarian and media development organisations, local media and representatives of the Government of Haiti, in a collective effort to get life-saving information to affected populations and to channel the affected population’s voices back to aid providers. The initiative was funded largely through OCHA’s Emergency Relief and Response Fund (ERRF) with some additional short-term core funding in 2011 from the global CDAC Network and the World Health Organisation to support a cholera awareness campaign.

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The CDAC Network took shape based on the Haiti experience and on the very thorough way the experience was processed through the commissioning of the Network’s first Learning Review. The CDAC Network stepped up to help by providing a system-wide communication and coordination mechanism, bringing together humanitarian and media development organisations, local media and representatives of the Government of Haiti, in a collective effort to get life-saving information to affected populations and to channel the affected population’s voices back to aid providers. The initiative was funded largely through OCHA’s Emergency Relief and Response Fund (ERRF) with some additional short-term core funding in 2011 from the global CDAC Network and the World Health Organisation to support a cholera awareness campaign.

Not allowing ourselves simply to rush into delivery but spending time on developing our strategy and learning frameworks as well as on the collaboration process has been extremely important... CDAC has been systematically and successfully fanning the flame of people wanting to do something radically different. - Leigh Daynes, former CDAC Network Chair.
The response to the Haiti earthquake was a significant and formative part of the development of the CDAC Network both because of what it achieved and what was learned, as highlighted in the CDAC Haiti Learning Review.

The humanitarian response in Haiti was one of the largest cross-agency commitments to communication ever seen in an emergency. CDAC Haiti was seen as highly relevant and contributed to making the humanitarian effort in Haiti more effective, efficient and relevant to need.

It identified six key elements for an effective communication coordination mechanism:

• Credibility and knowledge of staff. 
• Integration with the existing humanitarian system. 
• Strategic leadership. 
• Establishment and maintenance of appropriate coordination mechanisms. 
• Training and capacity building. 
• Advocacy for better communication with affected people.

CDAC Haiti operated at two levels: as a collective of 20 organisations committed to the coordination and collaboration process in Haiti; and as a secretariat with local staff who coordinated, advocated and built capacity in the area of communicating with disaster affected people.

Initially set up as a three-month pilot initiative in January 2010, CDAC Haiti in fact remained operational for 22 months. It went through a phased development, influenced by the emerging crises and changing needs on the ground.

In the early months CDAC Haiti was driven by a few very committed individuals. However, once the local secretariat was set up, staff began putting in place activities to establish CDAC Haiti’s role as a coordinator, advocate and services provider for communicating with disaster affected communities. By the time of the cholera epidemic in October 2010, CDAC Haiti had gained enough credibility to be asked to become the Communication Sub-Working Group within the UN cluster system on cholera.

In January 2011 CDAC Haiti shut down for nearly three months when funding ended. The Secretariat’s newly appointed Global Co-ordinator persuaded Members at the global level to provide bridge funding to meet identified needs on the ground. In its last phase, CDAC Haiti’s coordination function became much less pronounced as its focus centred on exit and handover, serving to build capacity among its key government partners. The CDAC Haiti secretariat finally closed in November 2011.

Most stakeholders in Haiti agreed that its work ended prematurely as it would have had a critical role to play in the subsequent phases of the humanitarian response and recovery.

CDAC Haiti faced a number of challenges relating to funding, status and position within the humanitarian coordination system, as well as its structures, governance, processes and capacity – particularly in relation to the global working group. Its objectives went through several iterations driven by funding requirements, leading to different expectations of its role and capacity.

CDAC Haiti launched before the global CDAC Network was institutionally developed and had few tools, processes and structures needed to support a country-level operation. The running of CDAC Haiti was left to individuals to define and manage as opportunities and need arose.

Haiti was a significant milestone in CDAC Network’s development. It was its first field operation and ground presence coordinating system-wide communication with affected communities. With no template for what role the CDAC initiative should play, or how it should operate, it was the first opportunity to test the functions expected of a communication coordination mechanism and the operations it should put in place.

It provided some experiential evidence for what the CDAC Network could contribute through effective coordination of communication with affected communities as well as a platform for advocacy with OCHA.

Finally it underscored the vital importance of addressing governance systems, accountability, resource mobilisation and status issues globally, as well as when operating in the field.

At the UK launch of Left in the Dark at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in 2009, connections were made between the Thomson Reuters initiative and the authors of the publication. There was a palpable sense of synchronicity between these two initiatives and that they were working with an idea whose time had come.

In the spring of the same year two media development organisations, Internews and BBC Media Action, agreed a joint funding bid to the UK Department for International Development (DFID) to create the infoasaid project. Towards the end of 2010, the infoasaid project was set up with the goal of delivering information as aid itself using the most appropriate channels.

The project was funded as a two-year pilot working at multiple levels to build communication capacity through:

• Development of a range of preparedness tools to help aid agencies communicate better in an emergency. 
• Deployment of teams to the field to support partners in providing better information and communication responses. 
• Advocacy at system and organisation level. 
• Research to promote learning and strengthen the evidence base in this sector.

Its objectives were to strengthen the capacity and preparedness of aid agencies to respond to the information and communication needs of crisis-affected populations, and to partner with aid agencies to help inform and support their communications response in a variety of emergency contexts.

The infosaid project and the CDAC Network grew up together as important partners, though sometimes competitors. Since, both BBC Media Action and Internews were also CDAC Network founder members, the potential for bridging the work of the two entities was relatively easy and seen as beneficial to both.

When the infosaid project ended in December, 2012, after a decision not to seek further funding, its tools and resources were transferred to the CDAC Network by Media Action and Internews.

The “infosaid project helped us to move from the ‘why?’ to the ‘how?’ The argument has now largely been won about ‘why?’ and we have some good research and sense of direction. We now need to harness all the great people in the field who can, with our support, have much more impact with what they already do really well and who can learn to work in a much more collaborative way. In many ways infosaid mainstreamed the concept that people loved and paved the way for CDAC discussions…” Jacobo Quintanilla, Internews.

Strategy Building – The Next Imperative

2010 saw many practitioners involved in the global CDAC group deployed to Haiti and later to Pakistan in August following the floods. This field-based activity led to a reduced emphasis on the development of a global network and, in effect, signaled a moving away from the initial CDAC Working Group strategy.

In July 2010, the Working Group met in London to review progress on the plans developed in 2009. The discussion covered a wide range of topics, identifying both the role of the entity as a partnership or collaboration ‘broker’, building and navigating relationships between different stakeholders, and the need for a more traditional secretariat function.

The group agreed on three priorities:

1. Building and convening a network of people and organisations committed to communicating with disaster affected communities, with a focus on sudden onset emergencies.

2. Establishing a number of working groups for those able to commit time to work on the five themes identified in the interim strategy: documentation, outreach and education, online, partnerships, and technology.

3. Forming a Steering Committee drawn from membership to define and drive the work.

FEATURE ONE
The First Test: CDAC Haiti and Lessons Identified

(What follows is drawn from the CDAC Haiti Learning Review – Final Report. 2012.)

...
An overall strategy was agreed to consolidate the CDAC Working Group into a competent, sustainable functioning entity to provide a predictable communications service in humanitarian contexts with specific objectives related to advocacy, capacity building, technical advice, and the documentation of best practice. It seemed to be happening on a “wing and a prayer” and at the global level there was no institution or mechanism to learn lessons, coordinate development or ensure impact and adoption of good practice. The meetings in 2010 and 2011 focused on how to take CDAC forward. It was agreed that it would be essential to find someone to coordinate. Rachel was one of three strong candidates and she got the job because of her rich experience in brokering collaboration. Oliver Lacey-Hall.

The newly appointed Global Coordinator, Rachel Houghton, began a nine-month contract in February 2011. She started work by conducting a series of interviews with all Steering Committee members. The aim was to identify headline themes and critical questions that would stimulate reflection and constructive discussion at a global level strategy meeting that March. The background paper she prepared for the meeting was widely recognised as a significant development in the CDAC Working Group’s sense of purpose and priorities. The meeting was well attended and, significantly, brought together the Steering Committee and Working Group members, alongside members of a variety of working groups set up in Dec 2009 to take the work forward.11

Those present worked together to:

- Articulate a shared vision, mission and objectives for the CDAC Network.
- Address how it could support existing initiatives and wider processes of change within the humanitarian sector.
- Define roles and responsibilities for the Steering Committee and Working Group members.
- Provide clarity on ‘membership’ and pragmatic ways of working.
- Develop a stronger sense of partnership in the ways of working between participating organisations.

The meeting led to a strategic review and planning process later in 2011, overseen by the Steering Committee, which explored the CDAC Network’s membership model, fundraising strategy, governance structure and ways of working, as well as the principles of partnership that the Network would adopt.

Another significant achievement in 2011 was the initiation and adoption of the CDAC Network’s change agenda through working collaboratively and collectively. It is important to note that at this point there was no formal document to define the governance structure of the Board, Membership and the Secretariat. It proposed the use of Communities of Practice (CoPs) as a key component of delivering the Network’s change agenda through working collaboratively and collectively. It is important to note that at this point there was no formal document to define the governance structure of the Board, Membership and the Secretariat.

February 2012 saw the launch of a five-year change strategy that clarified the purpose and vision of CDAC Network. Outlined its approach to change; and provided greater focus and direction for developing and managing the Network and its activities. A sister document sought to define the governance structure of the Board, Membership and the Secretariat. It proposed the use of Communities of Practice (CoPs) as a key component of delivering the Network’s change agenda through working collaboratively and collectively.

The CDAC Network will strengthen the capacity of practitioners so as to create space for innovative thinking to occur, explore critical questions and concerns, share knowledge, learning and skills, and strengthen collaboration between different stakeholder groups. The CDAC Network will support agencies to develop the capacity required to deliver two-way communication effectively.

**Building Member Capacity to Collaborate**

In 2012 there was a strong focus on building the capacity of the CDAC Network Members to collaborate efficiently and effectively, and to enable them to learn from each other. Three key events were initiated and developed by the Global Coordinator in collaboration with Network Members: the Media and Technology Fair, a partnership workshop, and the simulation exercise. The three events have been reported by several members as having been crucial to building capacity within the Network. However, some of those interviewed raised the question as to whether the end of 2012 saw a level of ‘process fatigue’ within the CDAC Network membership.

The following three features constitute the CDAC Network’s capacity strengthening, as funded by Invisasaid, during 2012.

**FEATURE TWO**


The two-day Media and Technology Fair, held in partnership with Google, BFC/Media Action, UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and GSM Association Development Fund, was designed as a convening, capacity strengthening, learning and advocacy initiative.

Its primary purpose was to showcase emerging field practice and approaches, introduce a variety of media and technology tools, and examine how communicating with disaster-affected populations can help to improve response outcomes. It also sought to facilitate a dialogue around the potential for further collaboration between media development, technology and humanitarian organisations.

I was involved in developing and running the Fair, and as someone from a small technology company was surprised at how little understanding or skills the humanitarian agencies had in terms of how best to use new tools and techniques for communicating with disaster-affected communities. Media agencies were asking “how can we help?” and the humanitarian agencies looked baffled and said “we don’t know”. Actually I was quite shocked by this!” Laura Walker-Hudson, Frontline SMS (SIMlab).

The programme12 was aimed at two distinct audiences. The first day brought together senior decision makers, potential donors, influencers, technology specialists and media experts. This explored current thinking and field practice as well as future trends in the use of media and technology in communicating with disaster affected people.

A market-place was set up by agencies to present case studies, showcase work and give participants an opportunity to experiment with various communication products and tools.

‘Having worked very hard to get her there, my CEO came away somewhat unimpressed with the Media and Technology Fair. There were bits that were absolutely extraordinary – the DJ from Haiti – but the whole thing was so huge and in the end the actual technology stuff was squeezed into a

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12 BFC World Service Trust, British Red Cross, International Media Support (SIM), Invisasaid, Internews, Irish Red Cross, UNFPA, Save the Children, Thomson Reuters Foundation.
13 Working Group members, chair and above Steering Committee members: ActionAid, ALNAP, the CBC Project, Frontline SMS, and CARE International. All were present except for CARE International.
The second day was targeted at operational decision-makers and ‘head-office innovators’ who could put learning into practice within their own organisations. It used scenarios to explore the practical implications of using new channels for communicating with disaster-affected populations and which tools and approaches would be appropriate in different stages of response and programme design.

Following the Fair, the Network now has a Service Directory13 with tools and approaches that would be appropriate in different stages of communicating with disaster-affected populations and which practice within their different organisations. It used scenarios and ‘head-office innovators’ who could put learning into practical use within their own organisations.

The significance of the Fair was in its positioning of technology and relevant media and technology providers.

Participants included CDAC Network Members and selected Members in terms of what each brought to the Network.

• Agree the attitudes and commitments needed for the CDAC Network to succeed.
• Build insights, skills and tools in order to turn the reality from a good idea into a practical model. There was also a focus on three fundamental challenges faced in many partnerships, shown below.14

The group agreed on the following outputs they felt should be expected of them in the Network:

• Collaborate rather than compete.
• Work to unlock potential by leveraging each other’s contribution.
• Sign up to a common purpose.
• Recognise and respect that our partners have different interests, values and approaches, which bring valuable diversity.
• Deliver what we promise.
• Stick with the relationship over time.
• Understand that we need to commit time and effort.
• Recognise the importance of helping each other to achieve our own organisational goals.

Inputs from the training team included partnership frameworks, tools, and an exploration of key skills required to a collaborative model. There was also a focus on three fundamental challenges faced in many partnerships, shown below.14

One important conclusion of the workshop found the CDAC Network as more a ‘collaboration’ than a ‘formal partnership’. The following approach was agreed by the group:

• CDAC Network is a collaborative model using partnership approaches, tools and skills to make it more active, dynamic and productive.
• This includes adopting the principles of partnership as a starting point: Equity, Transparency, Mutual benefits; Active participation and Results-based management.15
• There may well be a range of informal and formal partnerships that develop within the CDAC Network.

• Engage resident and local stakeholders to avoid confusion and build coherence across the Network.
• The Secretariat will map and value Member contributions of all kinds, though more as a social networking process than accounts management.
• Further consideration will be given to different levels of collaboration and how these might be applied within CDAC Network.16

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The simulation exercise identified organisational, operational, communication and cross-sector collaboration issues. It also provided important input into developing the CDAC Network’s role in terms of coordination mechanisms and processes to support agencies as well as building the capacity of the Network to collaborate better at field-level. It also generated discussion around building the Network’s capacity to support in preparing for disasters.

In addition to specific lessons around the realities of communicating with disaster affected communities, a more generic question emerged significant to the Network’s second strategic ‘pillar’ to encourage action learning and research: How good are CDAC Network Simulation, October 2012.

It concluded with a debriefing and discussion to look at what the participants perceived to have happened, what observers saw happening, identify what lessons could be drawn from the experience, and agree what further action the CDAC Network could take based on those insights.

The outputs from the event were a Simulation Report17 capturing the simulation purpose and outcomes and planned production of a Toolkit and Guidance Notes for multi-agency simulations in the field.

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Members, both individuals and institutions, at internalising lessons drawn from experience?

The Simulation Report notes that participants did not draw on their positive experiences of CDAC Haiti – highlighted in the independent Haiti Learning Review – in providing services, coordination, strategic leadership, capacity and advocacy. Was this because there were different people from the agencies involved in Haiti at the simulation event? Did they not have access to institutional memory? Or is it because people do not read or remember learning reviews? In either case, what are the implications for Network Member organisations in ensuring that learning is both captured and applied?

Despite challenges it seems that simulations can serve as a key preparation and capacity strengthening mechanism. They provide an opportunity to rehearse how collaboration and coordination should work under pressure, get to know potential partners, build relationships, understand different approaches being used, try out new or different tools and technologies. They can also lead to improvements in core processes based on practical experience, and address staffing churn by creating induction and networking opportunities. The simulation was also useful in validating stakeholders’ minds the existence and importance of the Network itself.

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**Game-Changing: Funding from DFID**

‘Securing two sizeable grants from a single donor in the past 18 months at a time when almost every other endeavour is simply struggling to find any funding at all is a great endorsement of the CDAC vision and of our persistence.’

Richard Cobb.

In 2013 CDAC Network was awarded a two-year discretionary grant by DFID. This meant that the Secretariat team could take a highly active and supportive role when Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines in November 2013.

Subsequent to receiving the discretionary grant, the CDAC Network was invited to be part of a new DFID preparedness fund, the Disaster & Emergency Preparedness Programme (DEPP).

‘Money in the bank is a game-changer; now we can do things and talk things through properly with people who are paid to deliver. The early days were somewhat frustrating with so many great ideas floating around but so little capacity to do anything substantial. CDAC is now in a position in which we can actually get busy. Having said that, the plan of work needs to be realistic with the funding available.’

Lisa Robinson, BBC Media Action.

In September 2013, the DFID funding enabled the CDAC Network to recruit new staff to its Secretariat, which in turn meant the team could take a highly active and supportive role when Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines in November 2013.

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**FEATURE FIVE**

Turning on a Sixpence: CDAC Network’s Response to Typhoon Haiyan, Philippines, November 2013

The Network’s Field Coordination Community of Practice (CoP), chaired by OCHA, initiated the process for establishing how CDAC Network Members would collaborate in the field. OCHA in the field also co-chaired a Communicating with Communities (CwC) Working Group with the Philippines Information Agency, which functioned as a cross-cluster support service and communication coordination mechanism. An early mechanism for mobilising the Network included a teleconference call between the global agency focal points and an open Skype group of the agencies involved in the CoP, as well as telecommunications and other organisations.

The CDAC Network Secretariat’s role was critical in information and resources management, brokering and monitoring collaboration, developing advocacy messages to donors and the Disaster Emergency Committee (DEC) and addressing accountability as well as other strategic issues.

Typhoon Haiyan created an action learning opportunity for the Secretariat to test its role in facilitating and coordinating communication work undertaken by the Network as part of the emergency response. In December 2013, it instigated an internal learning review that took the form of a meeting between the Secretariat staff and consultant, Miranda Elkins. Its purpose was to review and reflect on the role and functions performed by Secretariat staff, the strengths shown in the Secretariat’s work and identify areas for improvement.

The review highlighted several areas which worked well, the definition at the outset of the role and scope of work for the Secretariat, its information management tasks and tools, the coordination mechanism. An early mechanism for mobilising the Network Members would collaborate in the field. OCHA in the field also co-chaired a Communicating with Communities (CwC) Working Group with the Philippines Information Agency, which functioned as a cross-cluster support service and communication coordination mechanism. An early mechanism for mobilising the Network included a teleconference call between the global agency focal points and an open Skype group of the agencies involved in the CoP, as well as telecommunications and other organisations.

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The review led to recommendations from the team around existing communications platforms and products, its information management function, and its role in supporting advocacy and needs assessments.

Until the appropriate OCHA structures and staff were in place at field level, the CDAC Network’s Secretariat took a more active role in supporting field operations in the Philippines, providing information management, brokering, advocacy, strategic issues management, and administration support.

‘The response to Typhoon Haiyan is a beautiful example of how many years of leg-work can suddenly come together with all the hard work suddenly paying off. The CDAC Secretariat Team, most of whom were quite newly appointed to their posts, had to be turned on a suction to be ready for the response. The Network needed to operate as a single entity during the crisis and then afterwards revert to being a network of independent agencies. This is exactly what happened. The CDAC Network has made huge strides and many key players were rightly, very impressed.’ Imogen Wall.

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19 UK Government Department for International Development.
People and Process

The Network


Summaries of the discussions, outputs, outcomes and remaining issues from the meeting were captured by the Director and external facilitator in a Deliberating Note.

‘We all understand that each sector has its own cultural values and ways of working that are deeply established, and that working across traditional sector boundaries remains challenging. CDAC offers space, support and insights to enable very different types of Member organisations to pull together. It works best the closer the work gets to the coalface – this is where we need to focus now.’

Brendan Gormley, CDAC Network Chair.

No one thought it would be easy, but nevertheless it seems to have surprised Network Members just how challenging working across sector boundaries can be.

‘I suspect that one of the things that will continue to plague CDAC is the inter-agency dynamics and a persistent resistance to putting the collective above the individual agency agendas.’

Lola Costelow.

‘We still haven’t really articulated strongly enough what we have in common… and grappled with the fact, for example, that the business people see this as a business opportunity. This is still a disconnect in the Network but it is not insurmountable!’

Richard Cobb.

‘CDAC has the potential to be a big change-maker in terms of how the humanitarian sector can work far better. It is really exciting since new technologies are at the heart of where change is happening, but it still feels like a major struggle. One key question is: how many agencies at the highest level are investing real money in this work? Do CEOs really understand its importance? It still feels like a surprisingly hard sell!’

Colm Byrne.

21 The data from the interviews with Network Members and individuals from other humanitarian initiatives was used to produce the Director’s Consultation Report for the CDAC Network, disseminated to the CDAC Network in March 2014.

bilateral organisations beyond the membership make it independently of each other. Of course the range and variety of connections both within and beyond the membership make it somewhat complex in terms of maintaining connectedness and active engagement.

22 Independent humanitarian advisor and lead on the development of the CDAC Network’s first Strategy.

23 From conversations with Members and the Global Coordinator.

2014: The Current Situation

In the early part of 2014, there were two opportunities to check the progress made on delivering the Network’s Strategy. In the first of these, the CDAC Director undertook a series of interviews with Network Members to ‘temperature check’ their overall level of satisfaction with Network’s performance in 2013, understand better their on-going needs, and discuss some key issues including Network governance, membership issues and growth.

‘There have been successes and failures, but the CDAC Network has undoubtedly achieved a lot. It continues to be a “hearts and minds” engagement and it is the only initiative that I can think of, for example, that has had such a high level of interest from the UN. OCHA has been extraordinary in its enthusiasm for what the CDAC Network is doing.’

Richard Cobb.

In May the first Members’ Council Meeting was held to formally review progress on the Strategy. Topics covered included:

- The CDAC Network’s evolution and development since its inception.
- A review of financial and governance arrangements.
- Success parameters for key CDAC Network activities around preparedness.
- The development of the advocacy, research and learning agendas.
- Strategic options for the future.
- Development of new Network initiatives.

‘One key question is: how many agencies at the highest level are investing real money in this work? Do CEO’s really understand its importance? It still feels like a surprisingly hard sell!’

Colm Byrne, CDAC Network Chair.

There is still a tension between CDAC as a creative and flexible space alongside the need to institutionalise the nature and scope of the member relationships.’

Lola Costelow.

‘Often our organisations are not nimble and, it turns out, we are no bureaucratic and resistant to change.’

Leigh Daynes.

‘Our relationships are not mature enough yet.’

Jacobo Quintanilla.

There is a very real sense of goodwill and involvement amongst the Network membership but that does not mean that inter-sector tension and mistrust have disappeared. What is notable, however, is that this has not led to breakdown. If anything, it is the skilled navigation of the various explicit expectations and the diverse underlying interests that gives the Network its dynamism and drive.

How far these challenges have been addressed or resolved is beyond the scope of this piece of work. They are, however, covered by regular reviews of Member satisfaction and engagement undertaken by the Network’s Director.

Not surprisingly, individual Members can have strong views about the CDAC Network and their organisation’s relationship to it that derive directly from their own organisational culture, values and priorities. This means that different agencies have very different experiences of being part of the Network.

‘Sometimes we feel we are the odd ones out. We are always really concerned with the on-the-ground need and see CDAC’s main value in providing practical solutions to improving two-way information flows between relief operations and the field.’

The data from the interviews with Network Members and individuals from other humanitarian initiatives was used to produce the Director’s Consultation Report for the CDAC Network, disseminated to the CDAC Network in March 2014.

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Box 5: Some Network challenges identified by Members in 2013

- Uneven participation of Members.
- Different member-agency mandates.
- Different operational drivers.
- Lack of understanding between the different ‘sectors’ in the membership.
- Different funding mechanisms.
- Tension between global and operational level.

Box 4: CDAC Network Members (as of November 2014)

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Box 4: CDAC Network Members (as of November 2014)
There is, perhaps inevitably in a membership model, a tension between providing creative and flexible space alongside institutionalising the nature and scope of the member relationships. In the early days, CDAC worked with an expert in ‘Network Thinking’24 and a lot of his ideas seemed to lend themselves well — but the network wasn’t ready then. Maybe the time is right now for more substantive network thinking.” Lola Costelow.

In addition, there are a number of factors that enable as well as others that disable a membership model (Box 6, overleaf).

The following are five areas for action seen by many as enabling this membership model to work better:

• Build more active collaboration – beyond the ‘talking shop’.
• Define more clearly what Members should be doing and what the Secretariat does.
• Provide more support to those representing Member organisations to help them engage colleagues more fully in the CDAC Network work and to embed its lessons in their systems.
• Work collectively to find the evidence that demonstrates convincingly what an effective collaborative effort can achieve.
• Explore the concept and practice of leadership in a collaborative model – this includes the development of ‘shared leadership’ as well as examining how those in senior positions can exercise their leadership somewhat differently to build leadership in others.

‘What we are doing is important and quite complex; we need to look at ways to make a difference without making the processes too complicated. Each Member organisation needs to be prepared to give up some power and to engage more constructively. New ways of working are required from all of us.’ Brendan Cermoly.

The Secretariat

At the time of writing the Secretariat team comprises six staff each with a specific area of responsibility, with the Global Coordinator role having been re-framed as that of Director, deemed necessary to provide the leadership and authority to steer the programme of work and manage DFID funding.

In building the team, the Director has drawn strongly on the concept of ‘partnership brokering’. Partnership brokers are those who support and strengthen partnerships by their understanding and skilled management of the collaboration process.25 Team members all complete a four-day professional training course designed for those managing complex collaborations26 and this gives them shared frameworks, language and approaches that

24 Steve Waddell, Networking Action.
26 See www.partnershipbrokers.org for details about this training and the work of the Partnership Brokers Association that runs the course worldwide and also offers a formal accreditation programme for those operating in this role.

As well as working across entities, one of the key things in building a strong and productive network is to deepen engagement. This involves effort in working with different players, teams and functions within each Member organisation and is critical in moving from being a network of individuals who represent their organisations to becoming a network of organisations.

‘CDAC Network is amazing in that it is driven by the personality of highly committed individuals, their passion and drive. The problem is that this may not be backed up by a strategic intent from an organisation, this means that the individuals have to work very hard internally to build organisational buy-in. CDAC has not yet been able to achieve that strategic engagement from Save the Children. We have, in effect, under-delivered for a whole range of internal reasons, but this is hard from a Network perspective. We need to be sure that our investment in CDAC is bringing value to our organisation.’ Hannah Reichardt, Save the Children.

It was very exciting and refreshing when I arrived back after being away for six months… it was far less necessary for me to read my organisation’s involvement in CDAC. It is great to see how many more of my colleagues are involved. This widens the contribution our organisation can make and adds to the wellness of engagement on a practical level’ Lisa Robinson.

A number of activities and events developed for CDAC Network Members, mentioned in the first part of this paper, have intended to inspire and build capacity for interagency collaboration and collective action. These have undoubtedly built bridges and developed insights into what it takes to collaborate effectively. However, some have felt that whilst the activities have been engaging and useful in terms of content, in retrospect it has sometimes felt as if unresolved issues between Members tended to be avoided rather than confronted and addressed.

“We are five years in. This scares me quite a bit. Have we achieved enough? Have we really built really new approaches building on the diversity of the membership as we had hoped for? How cooperative are we actually becoming? What have we built from that early passion and magic?” Jacobo Quintana.

Operating within a membership model requires some new thinking and practices and this takes time, effort and a considerable willingness and commitment to relating somewhat differently.

The team recently co-created a working ethos to help provide a strong foundation for its work and is finalising a number of other documents that articulate the philosophy and focus of the Secretariat.

There is some debate in the membership about the roles of both the Director and the team including: Do they focus on the most pressing issues? Do they take too many decisions? Does their work truly represent the priorities of the membership?

We aim to MAINTAIN our:
• Enthusiasm & energy levels
• Curiosity and sense of exploration
• Balance between service and leadership
• Principles of support and empowerment

We seek to ROLE MODEL:
• Good collaborative practices
• Building in action
• Feedback as a team-building process
• The confidence to drive / challenge when necessary and support / give way when more appropriate

Box 7: The working ethos of the CDAC Secretariat Team
It is important that members understand that it is common in network-based organisations to find some divergence in expectations of the Secretariat – whether it is there to provide leadership and direction, or services to Members. The general consensus among the CDAC Network Members is that it needs to be both, and that the current approach gets the balance about right.

Rachel does the work of three people. She is strategic and confident and very capable – that is brilliant but also may mean that it is hard for her to accept things being slower than she wants and/or for others to step up. There is no question that the Secretariat is absolutely vital and the expansion of the team with others who can represent CDAC will be a great help and make the whole Network more sustainable. Hannah Reinsdorp.

I would encourage as much strategic leadership as possible from the Secretariat. The humanitarian sector itself is going through profound questioning and change, so if the Secretariat can help to shape thinking about the contribution of CDAC to risk reduction and humanitarian response, this will be a very important value-added service to Members. As the team grows and strengthens it will be able to field different players – building up the leadership within the team as a whole not just from the Director. This will make CDAC even more credible and effective. Mark Harvey.

The Collaboration Imperative

A key indicator of success was the ability of the CDAC Network and Rachel to hold the difficult conversations – trying to be very propositional about the way forward. I have been amazed to discover how very important it has been to focus on the collaboration process and to give space for those divergent conversations. It has been extremely valuable.

The first ‘minimum commitment’ that the Network adopts and that all Members ‘are expected to uphold’ is articulated as: To work together constructively and in accordance with the principles of that all Members ‘are expected to uphold’ is articulated as: To work together constructively and in accordance with the principles of...
because information is now being shared and good decisions are being made by better informed vulnerable communities.”

Lola Costelow.

In addition to some marked successes in terms of capacity development and on the ground response activity, there is growing evidence that the Network has created connections that have led to a number of bilateral and multilateral projects between Members. Whilst it is not always possible for Members to link a new initiative directly to connections made through CDAC Network, when asked, Members reported on more than 25 important pieces of work that had been developed directly between Members. This could be seen as a highly significant additional outcome of the Network’s existence and operational model.

True to its origins the CDAC Network remains an initiative about which those involved are very passionate. The opportunity to engage, to take some brave steps and to work through some of the many obstacles collaboratively and persistently remains a notable feature of the Network and those involved in it.

With more solid resourcing in place, the future looks very strong. We are really looking forward to how this will unfold… especially the proposed working in Bangladesh and South Sudan where we can test how we will collaborate on the ground – this will be great.”

Rasmussen.

‘The challenge is for us to keep the network owned and driven by Members with the Secretariat doing us forward and delivering some specialist aspects of the work.’

Brendan Gormley.

It seems that the CDAC Network is at something of a turning point. It is a bustling Network drawing together agencies from different sectors, and has achieved much already. It has an agreed strategic direction, funding in place and a shared determination to shift more quickly from planning to action. The CDAC Network has come a long way in a relatively short time and it is an entity with which those involved are still, clearly, proud to be associated.

The CDAC Network is seen as both an initiating and facilitating entity with its fingers in lots of pies which is lively and in many ways is very good but perhaps needing a little more clarity about what the real endgame actually is.” Having acknowledged that, and that there remain a number of challenges that need attention, it is also quite clear that both the Secretariat team and Network Members have high levels of enthusiasm, energy and commitment. This bodes well for its future and the story will undoubtedly continue to unfold, in line with the Strategy and perhaps also in some surprising and not-so-predictable ways.

Our long pedigree in building the membership and making the case positions us well for this next phase. But we now need to move from passionate debate to a practical focus on delivery and implementation – this is mission-critical.”

Brendan Gormley.

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<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Further explanation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tension between institutionalisation / structures and flexibility / nimbleness</td>
<td>As the Network grows and, specifically, becomes accountable to donors for significant funding, how can there be an appropriate level of institutionalisation without the loss of dynamism and the ability to respond to new demands spontaneously when necessary?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern about too strong a humanitarian focus at the expense of a communication focus</td>
<td>There remains something of a perceived disconnect between the media development and the humanitarian organisations and that there remains a number of challenges that need attention, it is also quite clear that both the Secretariat team and Network Members have high levels of enthusiasm, energy and commitment. This bodes well for its future and the story will undoubtedly continue to unfold, in line with the Strategy and perhaps also in some surprising and not-so-predictable ways.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to diversify funding sources</td>
<td>The funding from DFID is very much welcomed by Network Members but with it has come a new concern that perhaps the innovation and learning aspects of the Network may become secondary to delivering against project goals required by DFID. Funding coming from a range of sources may provide the flexibility Members would like – several feel that DFID’s confidence in the CDAC Network could be very useful in securing other funding. But how? And how much time is there to allocate to this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDAC competing with Members for funding</td>
<td>As CDAC itself gets project funding, how can Members be confident that this is additional to – not replacing – funding they may have been able to access as individual entities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility beyond the Network’s own membership</td>
<td>Communication between Members of the Network seems to be very good (the weekly E-mail update was mentioned by many as exceptionally useful) but is enough effort going into raising the CDAC Network’s profile more widely in order to have more impact?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to ‘risk’ building a stronger collective voice and advocacy agenda</td>
<td>Some Members feel that there has been too much focus on keeping Members ‘on board’, perhaps at the cost of a more risk-taking or advocacy agenda. This represents another balancing act for the Board, Director and Secretariat team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aligning the many different theories of change that different types of member organisations hold</td>
<td>While many Members appreciate the Network’s diversity – several describe it as ‘unique’ – working together does not come easily. There is, clearly, no one ‘theory of change’ – does it matter? Or is this one of the Network’s key strengths?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Box 9: Current and ongoing challenges identified by the Members

‘There is no doubt that communicating with disaster affected communities is one of the big issues of the moment. CDAC Network is well placed to capitalise on this, providing Members are able to “think big” and respond to the opportunities afforded by the institutional context. There is huge enthusiasm for this issue in Members of the Network… the question will be: how can we harness this enthusiasm toward the goal of creating systemic change in terms of capacity for communicating with disaster affected communities across the whole humanitarian system? The CDAC Network’s aim is to work across institutions and systems in the bigger humanitarian sector. We have a vocation to bring these different players together and make a difference. There is evidence already that change is possible but we also know it will be a long process.

CDAC Network Chair Brendan Gormley addresses Members at the Members Council Meeting in May 2014

32 Drawn from interviews with 16+ Network members and key others conducted by the author in July / August 2014.

33 Colm Byrne.
Endnote

"Telling a meaningful story means inspiring your listeners – co-workers, leaders, subordinates, family or a bunch of strangers – to understand the conclusions you have reached and then decide for themselves whether or not to believe what you say… People value their own conclusions more highly than yours. Once people make the story you have told into their story, you have tapped into a powerful force." 34

One of those interviewed for this case study said: ‘As a communications entity we ought to be better at capturing and communicating our own stories.’ 35 Here’s hoping that this paper is a useful first step in that process.

A limited number of paid days – 11 in total – were available for this work, which forced me to think carefully about how, with such time constraints, I could really review and draw useful conclusions from the very large quantity of written material, as well as reach out to a representative enough group of key stakeholders given their busy schedules? Inevitably I have had to be selective and to accept that it has not been possible to do justice to everything and everyone.

I was keen to respect and build on the dedication, emotional engagement and productivity of the Director and her team of committed and capable individuals, whilst also giving proper emphasis to the diverse – and sometimes quite divergent – viewpoints of others. The core team face what others operating in partnership brokering roles will recognise well: the dilemma of how to empower, support and give credit to others only intervening or shaping the agenda when absolutely necessary. And how to do this perhaps at the cost of being honest about how much they, as brokers, have actually done, or at the risk of those you are brokering not understanding the critical nature of your role.

I would like to give my warmest thanks to all those in the Network who gave their valuable time to inform this project (I spoke on the phone to more than 15 Network Members); the Secretariat team who are themselves working so hard to broker collaboration effectively, and to the CDAC Network’s Director, Rachel Houghton, who is demanding and inspirational in equal measure and thus both challenging and very exciting to work with.

Finally, I am also grateful to my colleague, Surinder Hundal 36, who undertook the essential desk research that underpins this paper; her attention to facts and detail left me wonderfully free to focus on underlying issues and the bigger picture.

Ros Tennyson

Author

35 Leigh Dypas.
36 Surinder Hundal is an independent Partnership Broker, currently Acting Chair of the Partnership Brokers Association
37 Ros Tennyson is an independent Partnership Broker, Founder and currently Development Director: Strategy of the Partnership Brokers Association.