

HPG Working Paper

# Regional organisations and humanitarian action

Steven A. Zyck

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## About the author

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# Overview

Regional organisations are frequently cited as key emerging actors in the humanitarian sphere. However, the truth tends to be far more nuanced, with wide variations among regional organisations and in their contributions to humanitarian action, including aid provision, disaster risk reduction (DRR) and conflict management. Despite a spate of humanitarian institution-building among regional organisations, several of which have established specialised humanitarian departments, policy frameworks, committees and funds, their actual contributions are uneven. To provide one example, few regional organisations have played any role in responding to refugee needs, despite the tendency for regional bodies to express concern over this trans-boundary issue. In

relation to conflict management, including mediation efforts and protection-oriented peacekeeping, African regional organisations, particularly the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States, are among the very few regional institutions to have made a significant contribution. That said, nearly all regional organisations have responded to DRR given that such efforts are rooted in regional commitments and processes. The variable involvement of regional organisations in humanitarian action appears to stem from a wide range of political and capacity issues, which this paper begins to explore. However, many of the key questions regarding regional organisations – including basic information on their humanitarian activities – remain poorly studied.



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# Acronyms

<b>ADB</b>	African Development Bank	<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States
<b>ADMER</b>	ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response	<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>AFISMA</b>	African-led International Support Mission to Mali	<b>FARC</b>	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia
<b>AHA Centre</b>	ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance	<b>GCC</b>	Gulf Cooperation Council
<b>AHTF</b>	ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force	<b>HFA</b>	Hyogo Framework for Action
<b>AMISOM</b>	African Union Mission in Somalia	<b>IACNDR</b>	Inter-American Committee on Natural Disaster Reduction
<b>AMU</b>	Arab Maghreb Union	<b>IDPs</b>	Internally Displaced Persons
<b>ARF</b>	ASEAN Regional Forum	<b>IFRC</b>	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations	<b>IGAD</b>	Inter-Governmental Authority on Development
<b>AU</b>	African Union	<b>IGADD</b>	Inter-Governmental Authority on Drought and Development
<b>CAN</b>	Andean Community	<b>LAS</b>	League of Arab States
<b>CAPRADE</b>	Andean Committee for the Prevention and Response to Disasters	<b>MDGs</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>CARICOM</b>	Caribbean Community	<b>MINUSMA</b>	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
<b>CCAPRRI</b>	Coordinating Committee on Assistance and Protection to Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa	<b>NAFTA</b>	North American Free Trade Agreement
<b>CEPREDENAC</b>	Coordination Center for Natural Disaster Prevention in Central America	<b>NEPAD</b>	New Partnership for Africa's Development
<b>DDR</b>	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration	<b>OAS</b>	Organization of American States
<b>DRM</b>	Disaster Risk Management	<b>OAU</b>	Organisation of African Unity
<b>DRR</b>	Disaster Risk Reduction	<b>OIC</b>	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
<b>EAC</b>	East African Community	<b>PIF</b>	Pacific Islands Forum
<b>ECOMOG</b>	ECOWAS Monitoring Group	<b>PSC</b>	Peace and Security Council, African Union
		<b>R2P</b>	Responsibility to Protect

<b>SAARC</b>	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation	<b>SOPAC</b>	South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission
<b>SADC</b>	Southern African Development Community	<b>SPC</b>	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
<b>SADCBRIG</b>	SADC Standby Brigade	<b>TCG</b>	Tripartite Core Group (Myanmar)
<b>SICA</b>	Central American Integration System	<b>UN</b>	United Nations
		<b>UNSC</b>	United Nations Security Council
		<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme



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# 1 Introduction

A number of regional organisations have gradually but consistently, particularly over the past two decades, transformed themselves into growing players in the humanitarian sphere. They have involved themselves – sometimes independently and sometimes in response to UN processes – not only in aid delivery and coordination but also in disaster risk reduction (DRR), conflict management, peacekeeping and the protection of civilians. For instance, in 2008 the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) helped to facilitate aid delivery in Myanmar following Cyclone Nargis through the ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force (AHTF), a joint humanitarian–diplomatic endeavour which also involved the United Nations and Myanmar authorities in a ‘Tripartite Core Group’. Four years later, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) intervened in Mali following a military coup and rising Islamist militancy, helping to end the conflict in the country and spurring the United Nations to step in.

While at times controversial among humanitarian actors and regional organisations’ own member states, it is apparent that regional organisations such as ASEAN and ECOWAS are increasingly playing a role in international affairs and humanitarian action. Parallel developments are emerging in other parts of the world, with regional organisations increasingly seeking to prepare for disasters and other emergencies and mitigate conflict. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), for instance, established a Humanitarian Affairs Department in 2008, and the African Union launched a ‘Humanitarian Policy Framework’ in 2011.

This Working Paper examines the literature on regional organisations’ humanitarian priorities and activities. While a stand-alone piece of research, it sets the stage for a broader study into regional organisations and humanitarian action by reviewing – and identifying gaps in – the existing literature. Indeed, it is important to acknowledge that there are many gaps in understanding, as research on (and attention to) regional economic cooperation and regional trade agreements has long outpaced work on regional organisations’ humanitarian efforts.

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 examines key concepts applicable to regional organisations, including foundational issues such as subsidiarity and sovereignty. While this paper primarily focuses on tangible issues, a basic conceptual overview helps to address some of the assumptions and conventional wisdom surrounding regional organisations. Chapter 3 offers a short review of the emergence of regional organisations’ humanitarian institutions, and Chapter 4 addresses an issue about which far less is known – the activities of regional organisations in crisis-affected contexts. Given the breadth of humanitarian action, this chapter focuses on assistance to refugee populations – given that they comprise a regional challenge – as well as DRR and conflict management. Then, wrapping up the discussion, Chapter 5 presents a series of questions which have not yet been addressed within the existing literature on regional organisations’ role in humanitarian action. Such questions will, in the future, be addressed in the Humanitarian Policy Group’s broader ‘Zones of Engagement’ project, which involves fieldwork concerning regional organisations in the Sahel and Southeast Asia (see HPG, 2013). However, before addressing key concepts, institutions and activities, it is useful to clarify some of the core terms used in this paper.

## 1.1 What are regional organisations?

As recent research has noted, the term ‘regional organisations’ has been commonly used, but without sufficient clarity. For instance, with a broad and roughly hewn notion of regional organisations, the literature at times approaches trade pacts (e.g. the North American Free Trade Agreement) on a par with broader bodies such as the Organization of American States (OAS) or the African Union (AU) (see, for instance, Swanström, n.d.). At other times the literature examines issue- or resource-specific bodies (e.g. the Nile River Initiative) alongside those which are perhaps more rooted in identity (e.g. the League of Arab States) or religion (e.g. the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) without providing a clear

rationale for doing so. Hence, it is important to determine the key elements which define regional organisations, and differentiate them from other inter-state bodies.

This study considers a regional organisation to be an institution which meets the following criteria: (i) substantial geographic proximity or contiguity; (ii) an official intergovernmental status enshrined in a treaty or comparable legal instrument; (iii) a cooperative or collaborative mandate rather than a primarily defensive mission; and (iv) a multi-sectoral focus (i.e. addressing a range of issues rather than a single topic, such as free trade or fisheries) (see Goertz and Powers, 2011). Given the focus of this study on humanitarian action, this research will primarily consider those organisations which have some direct relation to humanitarian action, including emergency response, disaster risk reduction and the protection of civilians.

This definition excludes non-regional bodies and those which are primarily concerned with issue-specific coordination or trade facilitation. It also excludes bodies such as NATO, which is not regional (in a conventional sense) and which is primarily focused on collective defence and war-fighting. However, it includes the Arab League and the OIC, both of which have a high degree of geographical contiguity and which have adopted a role in responding to conflicts and disasters. The study also includes bodies, such as ECOWAS, which appear (in terms of their names) to be focused on a single issue or sector (economic integration), but which nonetheless have far broader mandates and portfolios.

### 1.1.1 Regional versus subregional organisations

In the interest of clarity, this study treats regional and subregional organisations as a singly type of entity (regional organisations) given the lack of credible reasons for differentiating between the two (Ferris and Petz, 2013). Consider, for instance, that some continents (or large regions) have an overarching regional organisation such as the AU and the OAS, while others, such as Asia, have only subregional institutions. Indeed, individual nations tend to belong to a wide variety of partially overlapping regional and subregional organisations (see Figure 1 and Annex 1). The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) belongs to seven regional organisations, while several Central Asian republics belong to six. While not generally

distinguishing between regional and subregional organisations, this paper emphasises those areas in which a ‘subregional’ entity is mandated to seek the approval of a larger regional body before taking action.

## 1.2 Scope: humanitarian action

This review focuses on humanitarian action, which is defined here in accordance with the ‘Principles and Good Practices of Humanitarian Donorship’ as activities intended ‘to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and in the aftermath of man-made crises and natural disasters, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for the occurrence of such situations’ (Good Humanitarian Donorship, 2003: 1). Hence, this study will look at a range of specific activities, including the provision of relief assistance during and immediately after crises, as well as DRR activities.<sup>1</sup> Conflict management, peacekeeping and broader military activities will also be examined where they are perceived to have prevented or alleviated suffering and protected civilians from ongoing or imminent harm. However, this study will not consider longer-term post-crisis recovery, development cooperation or broader military or diplomatic interventions which do not meet these criteria. Nor do the following chapters explore the work being undertaken by regional development banks and regional UN or World Bank institutions except where they overlap markedly with Southern regional organisations’ humanitarian roles.

## 1.3 Approach

As several previous studies have found, there is a dearth of credible sources regarding the activities and impact of regional organisations despite a growing literature focused on their institutional structures, frameworks and conventions (see Fawcett, 2004, 2008; Bailes and Cottey, 2005; GPDRR, 2011; Goertz and Powers, 2011; IFRC, 2011). Much of the information regarding these institutions tends to be produced by the institutions themselves, and straddles the border between analysis and public

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1. Disaster management is not specifically noted here, as these functions tend to apply to relief assistance and disaster risk reduction (DRR) activities.

relations. Yet there is emerging evidence and relatively independent analysis from think tanks and international organisations, including the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (2009, 2011), the United Nations, the London School of Economics (LSE) project on regional organisations (Herz, 2008; Nathan, 2011) and the Brookings-LSE Project on Internal Displacement (Ferris and Petz, 2013; Hay, 2013). Despite the value of this emerging research, much of the existing literature on the role of regional organisations in humanitarian action is generally normative and speculative, focusing on what these organisations – according to their policies and public statements – have put down on paper (i.e. in strategic frameworks and memoranda of understanding) rather than what they have actually done to date (Wilson Center, 2008). In other instances it is aspirational,

suggesting ambitious future roles for regional organisations without necessarily engaging with those factors, many of them political and historical, which have impeded cooperation.

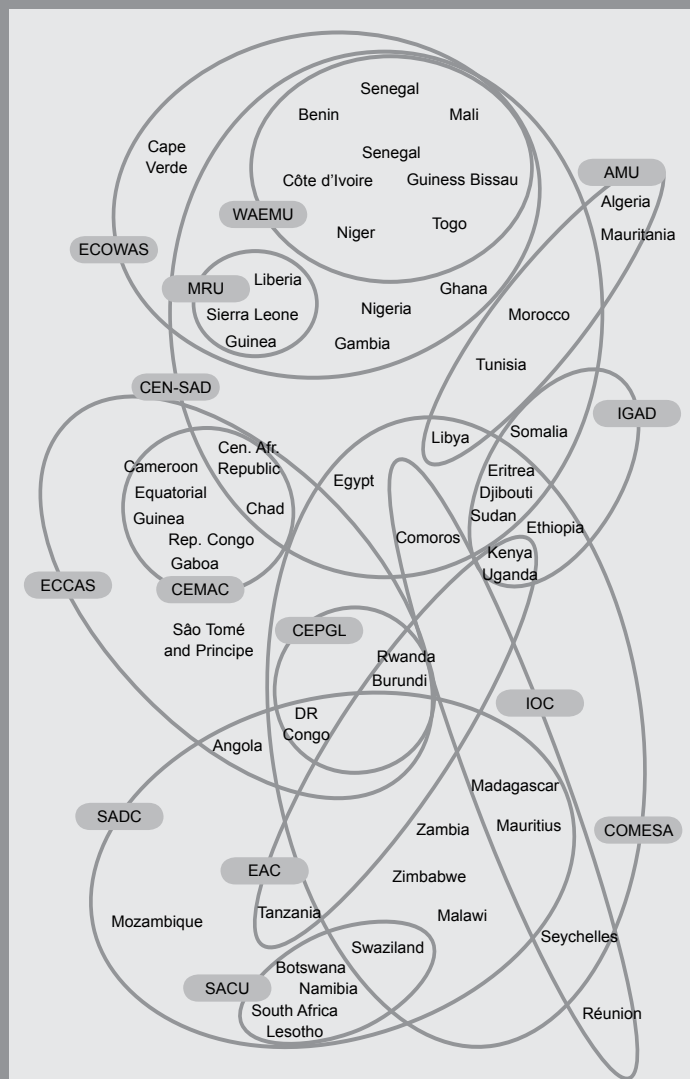
While highlighting these gaps in the literature, this paper can only begin to address them. The raw information about regional organisations' field-level activities has, by and large, yet to be collected. That said, recognising the wealth of research on regional organisations' policies and institutions (GPDRR, 2011; Haver and Foley, 2011; IFRC, 2011), this study instead begins a fuller discussion of their tangible contributions to humanitarian action. It reviews their work in three different areas: humanitarian assistance facilitation and delivery (particularly in relation to refugees), DRR and conflict management. Here the

**Figure 1: Regional organisations in Africa**

States frequently belong to several regional organisations. This has provided them with a variety of platforms for pursuing their interests based on the particular orientation of individual groups and their members. Figure 1 outlines African countries' non-AU memberships.

Acronyms: Arab Maghreb Union (AMU); Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC); Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD); Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries (CEPGL); Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA); East African Community (EAC); Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS); Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD); Indian Ocean Commission (IOC); Mano River Union (MRU); Southern African Customs Union (SACU); Southern African Development Community (SADC); West Africa Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU).

Source: *African Regional and Sub-Regional Organizations* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Africa Program, October 2008).



study not only looks at what regional organisations have implemented (e.g. delivering assistance), but also what they have achieved in terms of stakeholder coordination, situation monitoring, lessons sharing and research. Given that few previous studies have addressed the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of regional organisations, this study inevitably misses some

contributions which have recently emerged or which are poorly documented. We have endeavoured to avoid such oversights to the extent feasible, though the hope is that this Working Paper will serve as a basis for identifying gaps in understanding and filling them with the active involvement of regional organisations.

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# 2 Concepts underpinning regional organisation

While research into regional organisations' humanitarian roles is relatively new, regional organisation – that is, the manner in which states form unions for varying purposes – has been a longstanding subject of study (Nye, 1965; Barrera and Haas, 1969; Haas, 1958, 1970, 1971; Wallace and Singer, 1970). This chapter does not attempt to engage with the full richness of that literature, much of which focuses on European integration (Graglia, 2013), but instead lays out some key concepts which guide researchers', policymakers' and practitioners' thinking regarding regional organisations. These include subsidiarity and supremacy, sovereignty amidst supranationalism and solidarity (or South–South cooperation). These three points emerge from a review of the literature on regional organisations, but were particularly shaped by conceptual work undertaken by the Asian Development Bank Institute (Acharya, 2012) and others (see, for instance, Albert and Hilkermeier, 2001; Miller, 1967).

## 2.1 Subsidiarity and supremacy

The principle of subsidiarity requires that 'a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to co-ordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good' (Quadragesimo Anno, 1931, cited in Møller, 2005: 3). Subsidiarity suggests that responsibility for addressing a crisis should rest with the most 'local' level possible (UNDP, 1999). A central government should not take on a situation which provincial authorities have the ability to resolve, and a regional organisation should not address crises which national authorities are able to address. Accordingly, the United Nations would be the final actor to intervene once all subsidiary layers, including regional organisations, have proved incapable of providing a solution. Conversely, supremacy holds that higher-level decisions or norms, where determined to be necessary, take precedence

over lower-level commitments. Hence, UN conventions would theoretically supersede those of a regional organisation or individual state. Subsidiarity and supremacy, even if not labelled as such, play a role in shaping the remit and work of regional organisations. The principle of subsidiarity helps to explain why, for instance, ASEAN was closely involved in Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar – which did not have the capacity to deal with the crisis – while playing a far smaller role in large-scale disasters in Thailand and elsewhere in the region (Ferris, Petz and Stark, 2013).

Subsidiarity, in particular, provides a series of rationales which have been fundamental in driving the global push for the formation of international organisations since the end of the Second World War. Lower-level (e.g. regional) organisations are presumed to face unique outcomes of conflicts and disasters within their neighbourhoods, whether in the form of refugees, communicable diseases or the spread of violence across borders. Hence, they may have a greater interest than supranational bodies or non-regional actors in addressing those challenges quickly and thoroughly (Paliwal, 2010). Furthermore, subsidiarity is rooted in the presumption that states will feel more ownership over regional commitments – for instance, concerning environmental protection or displacement – than global ones and, hence, will be more likely to comply with them. Lastly, subsidiarity is – from an operational perspective – bolstered by the perception that lower-level stakeholders better understand problems (e.g. the drivers of a conflict), and may thus be able to address them in a way which is more contextually or culturally appropriate (OSCE, 2011). Such a perception was reflected in an August 2013 UN Security Council debate on regional organisations. The debate report notes that 'regional and subregional organizations are well-positioned' to understand and respond to crises in their neighbourhoods 'owing to their knowledge of the region' (UNSC, 2013).

These presumed benefits of subsidiarity have, particularly as applied to regional organisations, been called into question. For instance, regional organisations

may in some cases have excellent capabilities for economic cooperation, but it is rarely clear whether they have the appropriate mix of capacities to address a particular threat (Ajayi, 2008). Hence, subsidiarity implies a high degree of uncertainty when applied to relatively novel and emerging challenges (e.g. mounting ethnic or sectarian tensions) where it is unclear whether lower-level bodies are able to respond effectively or at all. In addition, Bjørn Møller (2005) notes that subsidiarity can lead to ‘passing the buck’, allowing international bodies to defer responsibility for complex or costly challenges to regional bodies which are perhaps less likely to have the resources or capabilities to resolve them (see also Bellamy and Williams, 2005; Diehl and Cho, 2006). Some, for instance, point to such a dynamic in locations such as Mali in late 2012 and early 2013, when the United Nations encouraged ECOWAS involvement despite knowing that it could take upwards of nine months for the regional body to muster a peacekeeping force (Zyck and Muggah, 2013; Francis, 2013). Lastly, many experts have noted that lower-level bodies may in fact be the least-suited to respond to particular types of crises given that relations among neighbouring countries are commonly weighed down by long histories and diverse agendas (Alden, 2010; Nathan, 2010). Hence, regional organisations may be unwilling to come to the aid of a neighbour with whom they have a fractious and contentious relationship. In other cases, regional power dynamics may come into play, and a regional organisation’s ability to support its neighbours may be influenced by the regional heavyweight (e.g. Nigeria in ECOWAS, India in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)) (Møller, 2005; Wulf, 2009; Wulf and Debiel, 2009).<sup>2</sup> Regional hegemons may, for instance, prevent a particular organisation from taking a step which they oppose – but which the broader membership favours. However, in other instances they are powerful enablers, mobilising resources and neighbours to take action more quickly and effectively than they might otherwise have done.

Such criticisms are not particularly novel and are at least partly tackled by the principle of supremacy. For instance, where a lower-level actor may possess the capacity to take a particular action (e.g. protect refugee populations or combat climate change), but lacks the political will to do so, a higher-level or supreme body

(e.g. the United Nations) may step in to mandate compliance by establishing norms of one sort or another (e.g., laws, conventions). Supremacy, in the case of regional organisations, applies to several elements of international and international humanitarian law as well as to peacekeeping. The United Nations Charter states: ‘The Security Council shall, where appropriate, utilise such regional arrangements or agencies for enforcement action under its authority. But no enforcement action shall be taken under regional arrangements or by regional agencies without the authorization of the Security Council’ (Chapter VIII, Article 53(1)).

Of course, such principles do not necessarily always feed into practice in an international system in which supremacy and subsidiarity are mitigated by political realities, power imbalances and the interests of member states. Furthermore, monitoring and enforcement capacities remain limited, creating a situation where ‘supreme’ policies are primarily hypothetical and can, in many cases, be sidestepped. That said, subsidiarity and supremacy provide a basis for relations among multilateral institutions, including regional organisations.

## 2.2 Sovereignty amidst supranationalism

The question of sovereignty has featured prominently within discussions of regional organisations. While there is generally a presumption that multilateral bodies are a form of supranationalism – ceding state sovereignty to a higher level (Best, 2012) – regional organisations have routinely acted as defenders of sovereignty (Seymour, 2013). For instance, nearly all regional organisations aside from the AU and ECOWAS operate by strict principles of non-interference in their members’ domestic affairs (Nathan, 2010). This particularly applies to ASEAN, which has been a stalwart defender of state sovereignty (Ramcharan, 2000), and to the OAS.<sup>3</sup> Non-interference was enshrined in the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) until it transformed in 2002 into a far more interventionist body – the African Union – authorised to intervene in member states in the event of war crimes, genocide or crimes against humanity (United Nations, 2011; African Union, 2002).<sup>4</sup> However, a number of AU members continue to oppose the growing willingness of

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2 Despite India being seen as the regional hegemon, it was actually Bangladesh that drove the formation of SAARC, and which has been seen as a major player in the Association.

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3 Regarding ASEAN, emerging research suggests that more socially and culturally liberal elements within the region are actively pushing for a more ‘involved’ ASEAN (Davies, 2013).



the organisation to which they belong to intervene in member states. As Wulf (2009: 8) argues:

*The nation-state's authority is jealously guarded and its delegation to a regional body is opposed by most governments. Most regional bodies stress their character as inter-governmental organisations that might cooperate and pool resources, but still their members refrain from relocating governmental authority to the regional body.*

Member states have commonly tended to accept the supranational role of regional organisations only to the extent that it furthers their national interests and desire for sovereignty. For instance, regional organisations provide a platform for member states to advocate on behalf of their sovereignty when facing threats of external interference or intervention. They also present states with a potentially more acceptable fall-back option in the event that they require external support. For instance, as in the frequently noted case of Cyclone Nargis, Myanmar was able to accept ASEAN's role rather than a harder-to-control and broader UN-mandated intervention which, in the junta's perception, would have comprised a greater threat to the country's sovereignty (see, for instance, Amador, 2008; Wu, 2010). Regional organisations came to be viewed as sympathetic interlocutors which could discourage or take the place of more intrusive UN-led interventions. Hence, by eagerly joining three, four or up to seven regional organisations (see Annex 1), countries provide themselves with a long list of potential partners and defenders when under threat or requiring external assistance.

Of course, any such statement is contingent upon the regional organisation in question. As noted above, ECOWAS has, at times, been more willing to intervene in member states than the United Nations, and has sought UN authorisation only after deploying forces (e.g. the ECOWAS Monitoring Group in Liberia in 1990). The AU has also grown increasingly interventionist, albeit generally as a close partner of the United Nations. However, the majority of other regional organisations have tended to hold tight to sovereignty, except in areas such as customs and fisheries management, which they perceive as being inherently regional in nature and more clearly beneficial to the region and to individual states.

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4 The three impetuses for intervention noted here (i.e. war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity) are specified in Article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act of the African Union.

## Box 1: ASEAN's role in Cyclone Nargis recovery in Myanmar

Shortly after Cyclone Nargis struck Myanmar in May 2008, ASEAN launched its first-ever Emergency Rapid Assessment Team, composed of officials, experts and NGO personnel from member states (Creac'h and Fan, 2008; ASEAN, 2010). Based on this assessment, the ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force (AHTF) was formed alongside the Yangon-based Tripartite Core Group (TCG); the TCG brought ASEAN, the Myanmar government and the United Nations together to facilitate response operations. Through the AHTF and TCG, ASEAN helped work with all stakeholders to facilitate humanitarian access while also engaging in some degree of coordination. During the relief and recovery phase, ASEAN (2010) notes that it had facilitated or expedited visas for more than 3,800 members of the international community and collaborated with donor institutions to help overcome concerns about providing resources to Myanmar. A number of analysts have credited ASEAN's consistent engagement with Myanmar's government, and its subtle form of influence and pressure, as a major factor in helping the country to open up to other members of the international community (Ranjan, 2009).

## 2.3 Solidarity (or South–South cooperation)

Regional cooperation and integration have also been heavily influenced by a sense of solidarity among nations which see themselves as facing common circumstances or, in many cases, threats. The first wave of regional organisation in developing countries took place alongside decolonisation and Arab nationalism (Fawcett, 2008). Both sentiments led to a desire to reduce reliance on former colonial and Western powers and to instead cultivate South–South collaboration, a theme which has continued to varying extents to the present. Furthermore, as Fawcett (2004) highlights, this degree of solidarity was bolstered by the perception of common enemies (including but also beyond former colonial regimes). For instance, the Arab League was initially motivated by the establishment of Israel

following the Second World War, while the OAU (now the AU) was fuelled by opposition to colonialism and apartheid. Likewise, SADC first emerged as an attempt to reduce southern African nations' economic dependence on apartheid South Africa (Lieberman, 1997). The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) found a renewed purpose in isolating Iran during its lengthy war with Iraq (Partrick, 2011), and ASEAN's formation in 1967 was driven partly by opposition to the communist insurgency in Vietnam among several countries in the region (particularly Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand) (Hagiwara, 1973).

Yet while their formation was motivated by a sense of solidarity, the South–South basis of regional organisations has been undermined by a number of factors. First, regional organisations tend to be weighed down by long histories and tensions that fundamentally undermine cooperation, including around humanitarian issues (Putzel and Di John, 2012). For instance, Healy (2009) examines how IGAD's attempts to mediate conflict in eastern Africa were undermined by fraught relations among Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Uganda (several of which had supported rebel groups in their neighbours' conflicts in the past). Likewise, SAARC has, among regional organisations, been the least involved in humanitarian issues, a fact which many attribute to the consistent tensions within South Asia. In Latin America, solidarity has at times been complicated by competing regional blocs, which tend to have differing orientations towards the United States and its role in the region. This has not only caused problems for existing regional organisations, but it has also led to the emergence of new intergovernmental bodies, reducing the influence of regional bodies.

Second, regional solidarity and politics have been influenced by the presence of a regional hegemon. In some regions, such as West Africa, the hegemon – Nigeria – is relatively clear. The same is true in many respects in southern Africa, where South Africa is a key player. Yet many other regions lack a clear hegemon, including Southeast Asia (where Indonesia is by far the largest country and a member of the G20, but may not necessarily be characterised as a hegemon). In some cases a hegemon may be able to drive regional cooperation forward by shouldering a significant share of the costs and work involved. Alternatively, its dominance could be a source of friction, frustrating neighbours and leading to competition and animosity.

Analysts disagree on the question of hegemony and regional organisations; while some feel that the presence of a hegemonic power is overall a benefit to peacekeeping (see, for instance, Francis, 2010), others feel that it corrodes regional cooperation more broadly. Ultimately the literature is inconclusive both about what constitutes a hegemon, whether (and which) hegemons exist in particular regions and whether they tend to have an overall positive or negative influence.<sup>5</sup>

Similar issues apply to peacekeeping. Regional bodies are increasingly seen as implementing arms of the United Nations where it has funds to offer but little political will to send peacekeepers into insecure contexts such as Somalia, the eastern DRC and Mali (Muggah and White, 2013). Western military planners refer to such an arrangement as 'Western money, African boots' (Warner, 2013; personal communications). And while it is clear that regional organisations generally have their own security and humanitarian interests in forming such missions, a desire to continue receiving international support also plays a role. For instance, Nigeria, among the largest recipients of US military assistance in Sub-Saharan Africa, provided crucial support for the ECOWAS-backed intervention in Mali in early 2013. It is worth asking what official or implicit role the US government's \$600m annual aid package to Nigeria (Ploch, 2013), including its military, played in the decision.<sup>6</sup>

## 2.4 Concepts in need of revision?

This brief conceptual review demonstrates that regional organisations – rooted in promising concepts and principles – possess great promise, but also face significant hurdles. While regional organisations may be better placed to respond to crises within their neighbourhoods, they may also lack the resources, capabilities or political will needed to take meaningful action. This paper now turns from these sorts of hypothetical, conceptual issues to regional organisations' tangible institutions and activities in disaster- and conflict-affected environments.

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5 There appears to be increasing consensus that each regional organisation – and its current or would-be hegemon(s) – should be addressed as unique, rather than as emblematic of a broader tendency (Haacke and Williams, 2009).

6 The US government authorised a further \$96m in payments to ECOWAS countries contributing troops to ECOWAS' AFISMA mission in Mali in February 2013 (Oluwarotimi, 2013).



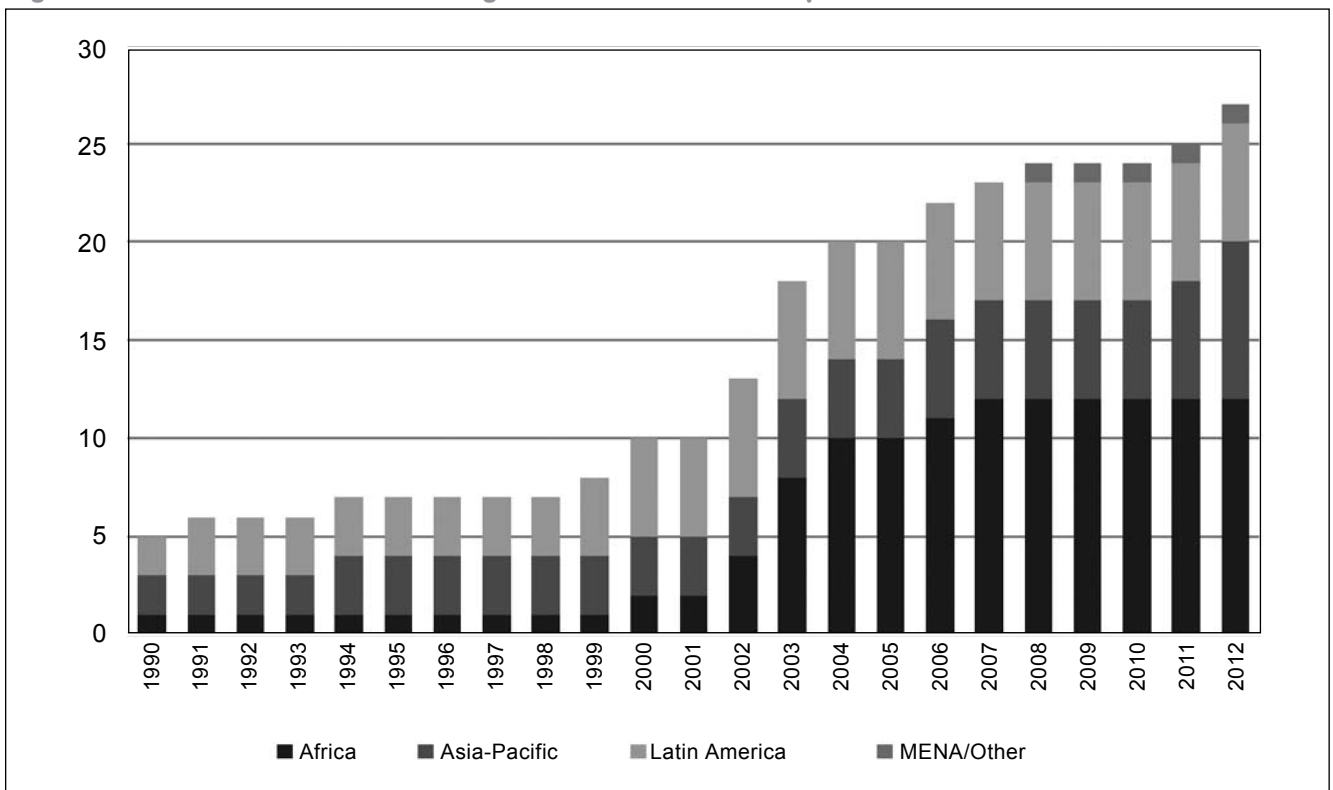
# 3 From concepts to institutions

In the late 1990s and 2000s, regional organisations began to develop more fully humanitarian institutions and build upon promising initiatives launched in preceding decades, such as the 1965 OAS Inter-American Emergency Aid Fund, the 1987 SAARC Food Reserve and the Central American Integration System (SICA)'s Coordination Center for Natural Disaster Prevention in Central America. These also built upon the work of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) – the predecessor to the present-day IGAD – which was among the first regional entities to be principally motivated, at its inception, by humanitarian rather than political, economic or security objectives (ROAPE, 1994). After a series of droughts and famines, the leaders of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Sudan agreed to form IGADD in 1985, and it was officially established the following year. IGADD tackled immediate humanitarian needs,

assessing the impacts of droughts and appealing to the international community for resources, alongside longer-term development efforts (*ibid.*).

The rapid emergence of regional organisations focused on humanitarian issues appears to reflect a variety of factors. First, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 not only brought greater attention to humanitarian and development conditions, but it also involved a regional monitoring process which implied joint responsibility among national and regional authorities. The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) on disaster risk reduction in 2005, which specified a role for regional organisations, further impelled regional entities to become more fully involved in humanitarian action, as discussed in Chapter 4. Regional organisations' desire to fully demonstrate their capacity and relevance on the international stage also contributed to their growing humanitarian role.

Figure 2: Cumulative number of regional humanitarian departments/centres<sup>7</sup>



<sup>7</sup> This graph is primarily intended to demonstrate trends. Exact dates of 'establishment' for particular institutions are often unclear given that the start date could be considered the year an institution proposed setting up a new humanitarian body, the year enough member states approved the new institution or the year that the humanitarian entity actually began meaningful operations.

A series of prominent incidents also contributed to the regionalisation of humanitarian action. The Rwandan genocide and its regional aftermath drove interest in the transnational nature of conflict and the need to avoid future atrocities; such concerns found particular expression in the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty report on the responsibility to protect (R2P) in 2001. Early-warning systems for conflict rapidly developed across Africa, driven by the AU but gradually expanding into the continent's various regional economic communities. Such institutions were particularly influenced by emerging econometric research which seemed to suggest that it may eventually be possible to gather sufficient data to see conflicts coming and respond accordingly. Aside from conflict, prominent disasters such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, which affected several regions, also increased interest in regional approaches to humanitarian problems.

As regional organisations emerged, trends become evident. The late 1990s and early-to-mid-2000s saw a strong emphasis on peace, conflict and security cooperation, while in the mid-to-late 2000s the focus was more on DRR and disaster management. More recently, a more mature form of regionalisation is emerging; that is, regional organisations are forming broader, non-issue-specific regional entities which are multi-sectoral and which are focused upon humanitarian needs in general, rather than specifically on conflict or disasters. Examples include the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance and the OIC International Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs Department. Likewise, the AU and ECOWAS have developed broader humanitarian policies that go beyond the UN-motivated frameworks they have previously tended to generate. While it is certainly too early to say, the establishment of these broader humanitarian entities and policies may suggest a new dynamic in regional humanitarian action. This merits further examination.

### **3.1 Regional institutions versus regional capacities**

Another key issue requiring further analysis is the capacity of regional institutions. While they have proliferated, many reports highlight their uneven levels of financing and human resources (both in terms of numbers and capacity). Unfortunately budgets for many regional organisations are unclear because their small core budgets are often supplemented by large and

generally donor-funded institutions focused on issues such as peace, security, development and humanitarian assistance. That said, one study by the United Nations University in 2008 analysed, based on interviews and surveys, the core funding available to regional organisations and their respective numbers of core staff members (i.e. those working in central institutions, excluding staff in field missions) (UNU-CRIS, 2008). The author concluded that 'the differences in terms of financial power and human resources are palpable' among regional organisations, with some having only a few dozen staff and others having several hundred. Core budgets ranged from as low as \$3m (IGAD) to \$157m (OAS) in 2007 and 2008, when the data was collected. While it is important to acknowledge that these figures may have changed markedly as regional organisations take on new roles and form new sub-units, they do provide a useful approximation of the stature of these organisations in recent years (see Table 1).

As the figures in Table 1 suggest, regional organisations, at least half a decade ago, had markedly different levels of personnel and funding. Some, such as ECOWAS, had relatively large staffs and budgets, while others were far more constrained. That said, size and funding was not – at least in 2007/8 – found to correlate with motivation and staff capabilities. For instance, the United Nations University study (UNU-CRIS, 2008) found that IGAD staff were particularly entrepreneurial and highly motivated, while many ECOWAS personnel were described as having been appointed based on nepotism rather than qualifications.

The study also shed light on the question of regional ownership and financing. For instance, only roughly one-third of the SADC's budget had been provided by member states, and only roughly three-quarters of the AU's core budget was provided by African nations. The AU is described as having hundreds of millions of dollars-worth of support from external donors, further calling into question the degree to which regional organisations might be influenced by external patrons (including China, which funded the construction of a new 23-storey AU headquarters building at a cost of \$150m) (UNU-CRIS, 2008: 22).

Such reliance on financial support from beyond regional organisations' own members is also found among regional organisations outside Africa. Ferris and Petz (2013) found that one disaster risk reduction initiative in the South Pacific received all but 12% of its funding from donors outside the region. ASEAN

**Table 1: Regional organisations' resources, circa 2006–2007**

<b>Regional organisation</b>	<b>Staff members</b>	<b>Core budget (US\$m)</b>
African Union	700	133 (inc. 96 from member states)
Association of Southeast Asian Nations	260	9
Caribbean Community	180	10
Economic Community of Central African States	50	17–18
Economic Community of West African States	300	121
Inter-Governmental Authority on Development	80	3
League of Arab States	500 (plus 500 consultants)	35.7
Organisation of the Islamic Conference	140 (secretariat) total staff of 1,500	23.7
Organization of American States	506	157.3
Pacific Islands Forum	100	23
Southern African Development Community	200	45.3 (inc. 16.5 from member states)

Source: UNU-CRIS (2008) *Capacity Survey: Regional and Other Intergovernmental Organizations in the Maintenance of Peace and Security*. Brussels: United Nations University – Comparative Regional Integration Studies.

Note: Staffing and budget figures are generally from 2006, 2007 or 2008; the authors of the UNU-CRIS study sought the most recent data available at the time of the research.

asks its ten members to each contribute \$30,000 per year for the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance, with the remainder of the Centre's resources being provided by donors (Ferris, Petz and Stark, 2013). New Zealand alone contributed nearly \$400,000 to the AHA Centre in 2011 (more than the \$300,000 which all ten ASEAN members were obliged to provide in total) (AidData 2.0, 2013).

The capacity of regional organisations today – as well as details regarding their funding and staffing levels – is poorly understood and requires further attention. Without such figures, it may be difficult to assess their ability to take on – and engage effectively in – the sorts of new (and old) humanitarian roles outlined in Chapter 4.



# 4 Regional organisations' humanitarian action

This chapter explores a more tangible yet also poorly studied topic – those humanitarian activities which regional organisations have thus far undertaken. The following sections, involving structured reviews of regional organisations' publicly available materials and the existing literature, examine humanitarian assistance provision (particularly in relation to refugees), disaster risk reduction and conflict management (including peacekeeping efforts focused on the protection of civilians). These are areas where regional organisations, according to the available literature, have played at least some direct role.

This analysis focuses on those regional organisations that have been most active in humanitarian and security issues. This group overlaps substantially with organisations being examined in the ongoing Brookings-LSE project on regional organisations' role in disaster risk management (DRM) (see Ferris and Petz, 2013). Such overlap is partly a reflection of the fact that the Brookings-LSE study has identified the most active regional organisations in the humanitarian sector; however, it also represents an intentional decision to ensure that this study is able to capitalise upon other major research initiatives on the humanitarian role of regional organisations. A lack of alignment and harmonisation among studies thus far has prevented sufficient dialogue within this research area.

## 4.1 Humanitarian assistance provision/facilitation for refugees

While regional organisations are primarily political and diplomatic entities, the literature is peppered with examples of regional involvement in aid delivery. This section assesses the extent of regional organisations' involvement in humanitarian assistance and gathers examples to illustrate trends or approaches. Given the breadth of humanitarian action, this analysis has chosen to narrow its scope to assistance for refugees, which have tended to pose a regional challenge and which regional organisations have frequently focused on in policy documents and conventions (Ngung, 1999). The AU addresses refugee issues under the 1969 Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (OAU, 1969); ECOWAS addresses refugees within the scope of its 1999 Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-Keeping and Security (ECOWAS, 1999). The OAS is guided by both the Contadora Act on Peace and Co-operation in Central America and by the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees (Lewis, 2012). Nearly all regional organisations reviewed in Table 2 have established agreements concerning refugees with UNHCR and other institutions (e.g. the AU's recent agreement with the Norwegian Refugee

**Table 2: Humanitarian activities by regional organisations**

Activity (refugees)	AU	ECOWAS	SADC	OAS	SICA	CARICOM	CAN	LAS	SAARC	ASEAN	SPC
Facilitating/negotiating aid access	■	■									
Coordinating aid provision											
Research and/or regional lessons learning	■							■			■
Funding aid activities (donor)		■						■			
Direct implementation of aid provision											

Key: ■ Clear role/contribution ■ Partial role/contribution

Council) (NRC, 2013; Security Council Report, 2006).

Aside from refugees, no facet of humanitarian aid has consistently been addressed by regional organisations, either in practice or via policy frameworks. And even in the case of refugees, engagement has been limited and uneven. While most regional bodies have discussed refugees at some point in their histories, few have played a direct role in addressing refugee issues during acute crises (e.g. by disbursing or financing assistance or by coordinating humanitarian actors). That said, they have periodically contributed to refugee responses in indirect ways, such as facilitating humanitarian access (AMISOM, 2013).

The AU, ECOWAS, the Arab League and ASEAN have all publicly criticised the lack of coordination in international aid activities, though none of the three has stepped in to adopt a role in aid coordination. Instead, the AU has focused its efforts on gathering and consolidating data regarding refugees and other humanitarian challenges, including through its recently revitalised Coordinating Committee on Assistance and Protection to Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (CCAPRI) (African Union, 2011). The Arab League has done much the same, dispatching missions to review the situations of Iraqi and, more recently, Syrian refugees in the region (Khraiche, 2013). The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) has examined the anticipated challenge of climate change-induced refugees in the Pacific (see, for instance, Vainerere, 2009). While useful, such work has tended to be in lieu of tangible action, rather than as a precursor to aid provision or coordination, which regional organisations generally lack the capacity to deliver.

Where regional organisations have provided assistance, the amounts involved are generally symbolic (though highlighting this fact is not intended as a criticism). For instance, ECOWAS distributed up to (reports vary) \$15m-worth of aid to Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau for refugees between 2005 and 2012 under the Peace and Development Project (PADEP) (ECOWAS, 2012). The funds were allocated to ECOWAS by the African Development Bank (ADB); ECOWAS then passed the money to the World Food Programme (WFP), which procured and distributed rice, maize and other grains to beneficiaries in the target countries (ECOWAS, 2012b). ECOWAS appears

to have primarily served as an intermediary involved in handing ADB funds to WFP, while using PADEP ‘launches’ in particular countries as an opportunity to promote ECOWAS’ role in the region (ECOWAS, 2002).

In a similar example, the Arab League reportedly distributed small amounts of aid, primarily medical supplies, to Jordan to aid Syrian refugees (Jordan Times, 22 October 2012); these supplies have then been distributed by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). In Sudan the League allocated up to \$30m for reconstruction activities, including the construction of between 12 and 15 model villages aimed at enticing refugees to return to Darfur (Sudan Tribune, 16 August 2013).<sup>8</sup>

Relatively modest amounts of aid from regional organisations appear to be common in other sectors as well. The ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (ADMER) Fund, which started in March 2012, reportedly financed \$100,000-worth of rice from WFP for the Philippines following Typhoon Bopha (ASEAN, 2012, 2013).<sup>9</sup> Likewise, ECOWAS provided around \$400,000 for humanitarian operations in Nigeria during major floods in 2012.

Other regional organisations have refused to intervene to help refugee populations. CARICOM and SAARC have declined to tackle humanitarian challenges involving Haitian (CARICOM) and Bhutanese (SAARC) refugees – despite pleas from particular states for them to take up these issues – due to opposition from influential members. SAARC has blocked official consideration of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal and India since at least 1991, claiming that to do so would violate the Association’s ban on discussions of bilateral or contentious issues (Chandrasekharan, 2008; Sridharan, 2008). SAARC is the only regional organisation reviewed here which does not have official treaties, conventions or

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8 The *Sudan Tribune* reported that 15 villages were being built, though other sources put the number at 12.

9 In addition, ASEAN indicates that it played a role, via the AHA Centre, in regional countries’ response to Typhoon Bopha, including food, milk and tents from Malaysia, \$1m from Indonesia and the deployment of a team of Singaporean experts.

10 CAN, a relatively small regional organisation, does not specifically have policies or treaties on refugees, though it has said that it intends to develop them (CAN, n.d.).

## Box 2: AMISOM and Somali refugees

In authorising the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in 2007, the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) mandated the mission to 'facilitate, as may be required, within capabilities, humanitarian operations, including the repatriation of refugees and resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs)'. This support to refugees has involved both the civilian and military components of the mission, with the latter helping to secure some aid shipments via ports and other key transit points. AMISON notes that its Humanitarian Affairs Unit works closely with OCHA and UNHCR as well as UNICEF, WFP and other humanitarian actors, most notably in sharing information regarding humanitarian conditions.

agreements that mention refugees.<sup>10</sup> Such recalcitrance reflects domestic concerns (e.g. regarding ethnic tensions in India) and regional diplomatic factors among India, Nepal and Bhutan rather than any principled opposition to regional humanitarian initiatives.

There have also been instances in which regional organisations, while not physically supporting aid delivery, have helped to protect refugees. Sharpe (2011, 2013) highlights the manner in which the AU Commission drew upon the 1969 Convention to prevent Burundian refugees from being expelled from Rwanda in 1996 and to help Sierra Leonean refugees facing potential rights violations in Guinea in 2004. That said, such instances are portrayed as rarities enabled by active refugee advocates; in most situations, the AU's refugee protection institutions and legal frameworks have proven incapable of addressing the plight of refugees. Sharpe (2013) notes that, in a trend common among regional organisations, the AU has focused on the quantity of refugee protection frameworks, institutions and initiatives, without paying much heed to their quality or effectiveness.<sup>11</sup>

11 Sharpe's (2011) research paper on the OAU and AU's refugee protection bodies highlights an extensive level of engagement with refugee issues within African regional structures. Conventions, committees, debates and conferences have not been in short supply. Yet the outcomes of these processes, which remain at an elite level, have been called into question.

## 4.2 Disaster risk reduction<sup>12</sup>

Although regional organisations themselves<sup>13</sup> rarely have the resources, capacity or will to provide sizable volumes of humanitarian assistance – which they view as primarily the role of the United Nations and other international organisations – they are interested in DRR (Ferris and Petz, 2013). Southeast Asia, the Pacific Islands, Central America and the Caribbean have repeatedly been affected by earthquakes, tsunamis, cyclones, hurricanes and other powerful weather events. Preparedness was further popularised among regional organisations by the HFA, which identified a particular role for regional organisations in conducting assessments related to DRR at the national and regional levels, reviewing progress on DRR, establishing or strengthening DRR centres and introducing disaster early-warning mechanisms (UNISDR, 2005: 15).

Regional organisations' engagement with natural disasters and DRR actually predates the Hyogo Framework. The IFRC (2011) notes that the AU's primary disaster strategy was formulated and adopted in 2004. Africa's regional economic communities made an earlier start, with IGAD long having worked on mitigating the humanitarian impact of droughts and food insecurity; its regional Disaster Risk Management Programme was launched in 2002, one year after the SADC had adopted its regional disaster strategy. Comparable DRR planning in the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and ECOWAS mainly emerged following the AU-wide 2004 Africa Regional Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (GFDRR, 2010).

Latin America began delving into DRR issues earlier still. In 1991 the OAS adopted the Inter-American Convention to Facilitate Disaster Assistance and the associated Inter-American Committee on Natural Disaster Reduction (IACNDR) (OAS, 1999). That

12 This section benefited from research conducted by Ferris & Petz (2013) in exploring disaster risk reduction. Ferris & Petz (2013) focus on disaster risk management (DRM), which they define as 'all activities intended to reduce risk or prepare for disasters as well as those associated with emergency relief and reconstruction'.

13 That is, regional organisations do not tend to have large resources available for providing humanitarian assistance. However, several of their members do commonly have greater resources, either independently or via regional organisations.



same year, CARICOM agreed to launch the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA), which was particularly focused on preparedness. The Andean Community's (CAN) Andean Committee for the Prevention and Response to Disasters (CAPRADE) was agreed in 2002; however, like many CAN agreements its primary mandate is to promote compliance with broader international (primarily UN) frameworks and agreements (IFRC, 2011).

In Asia, ASEAN and SAARC both established regional food security initiatives going back to the 1970s and 1980s, though overt work on DRR was primarily impelled by the December 2004 tsunami (ASEAN, 1979; SAARC, 1987). In July 2005, ASEAN established the Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (ADMER), which has led to regional cooperation on DRR while also strongly reaffirming state sovereignty and national leadership of all disaster-related efforts (OCHA, n.d.).

The Middle East and North Africa was perhaps the last region to begin adopting DRR-related frameworks, the most significant of which, the Arab Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction 2020, was agreed in 2010 (Arab League, 2010). The region's first Arab Conference on DRR followed in 2013, around the same time that the GCC began collaborating with the United Nations and others on DRR and HFA-related issues (UNDP, 2013). The OIC – though not exclusively a Middle Eastern and North African entity – began engaging directly in DRR in 2010 (Ferris and Petz, 2013: 67), though it had previously played a significant role in launching humanitarian appeals, providing assistance and conducting assessments in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Yemen, Gaza, Indonesia and elsewhere; however, these have tended to comprise disaster (or conflict) management rather than risk reduction (OIC, 2009).

These agreements have been accompanied by a wide range of activities related to DRR and disaster response (see Table 3 and Box 4). With the HFA and associated review/monitoring processes drawing attention to individual countries' and regions' performance, regional engagement has been far stronger than in other sectors, where the focus is more firmly upon the state and its legal obligations (e.g. in relation to refugee issues).

With regard to field-level interventions, progress has been uneven but relatively extensive. Every regional organisation has facilitated discussions and regional planning on DRR. In several instances these cover DRR as a whole, though many regions have begun to delve far more deeply into particular threats and sectors. Sahel regional organisations and IGAD – which are not included in Table 3 – have both done significant work on preparing for droughts and food insecurity, as has SAARC. For instance, the SAARC Food Bank helps to prepare for food shortages, while the IGAD Climate Predictions and Applications Centre (ICPAC) monitors weather conditions in order to better anticipate and prepare for droughts (ICPAC, 2013).

Nearly all regional organisations have engaged in some degree of regional coordination. However, coordination efforts are not necessarily comparable. Particular entities, such as the AU, CARICOM and ASEAN, have clear regional strategies that provide a degree of shared vision which extends across years. In other instances, organisations such as the Arab League engage in relatively broad-based planning on issues such as the environment, climate change and development without having a strong coordination function for DRR. The same could be said of the OAS, where member states have repeatedly endorsed the need for greater coordination surrounding DRR but have made little progress in that direction (in contrast

**Table 3: Activities related to DRR and disaster response**

Activity	AU	ECOWAS	SADC	OAS	SICA	CARICOM	CAN	LAS	SAARC	ASEAN	SPC
Facilitating discussions/planning on DRR	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Coordinating regional DRR initiatives	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Research and/or regional lessons learning on DRR	■			■	■	■	■		■	■	■
Funding DRR activities in member states (donor)	■			■						■	
Direct implementation of DRR projects/activities											

Key: ■ Clear role/contribution ■ Partial role/contribution



to advanced progress within ‘sub-regional’ bodies such as CARICOM and the Central American Integration System (SICA) (Ferris and Petz, 2013)). Indeed, SICA has been actively engaged with DRR (or disaster prevention) since the founding of the Coordination Center for Natural Disaster Prevention in Central America (CEPREDENAC) in 1987. The Center has developed strategies and driven research into natural disasters while also taking steps to integrate regional communication systems to enable early warning (CEPREDENAC, 2011).

CEPREDENAC’s focus on research is also common among other regional bodies. Here research ranges from short national missions to member states, which the OAS and ECOWAS have done, to the establishment of research centres focused on DRR and related issues. These include, to name just a couple of examples, the SAARC Disaster Management Centre in New Delhi and the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission

(SOPAC), which was founded in the 1970s and became a division of Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) in 2011 (Hay, 2013). In other cases, regional organisations benefit from research institutions which are independent or affiliated with prominent universities in the region (as in the case of the University of the West Indies). These institutions commonly engage not only in research but also in training and capacity-building for regional organisations and their member states. As with research, capacity-building has been widely varied but, on the whole, primarily focused on conveying information about key DRR concepts and international and regional frameworks through workshops and seminars.

Such initiatives have primarily been financed not by member countries themselves, which have demonstrated interest in DRR issues but a far lower willingness or ability to finance them. Conversely, donor countries have been particularly interested in supporting overseas

### Box 3: Findings of Brookings-LSE study on regional organisations and DRM

The Brookings-LSE study on the role of regional organisations in DRM (Ferris and Petz (2013)) examined 17 different indicators of performance and engagement. It noted that, while all regional organisations examined had DRR frameworks or conventions and regular intergovernmental meetings on DRM issues, far fewer engaged in funding or implementing projects. That said, many were involved in warning systems for natural disasters and in conducting research and capacity-building activities around DRM.

Activity	AU	ECOWAS	SADC	OAS	SICA	CARICOM	CAN	LAS	SAARC	ASEAN	EU	COE	SPC
Regular intergovernmental meetings on DRM	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Regional DRR framework/convention	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Regional DM framework/convention		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Specific organisation for DRM					■	■	■				■		■
Regional/sub-regional disaster management centre					■				■	■	■		
Regional disaster relief fund	■			■							■		
Regional disaster insurance scheme						■							■
Regional funding for DRR projects	■										■		
Provides humanitarian assistance											■		
Regional rapid response mechanism	■	■				■					■		
Regional technical cooperation (warning systems)		■	■	■	■	■	■				■		■
Joint disaster management exercises/simulations		■				■					■		
Technical training on DRM issues/capacity-building		■			■	■			■		■	■	■
Research on DRM/CCA issues				■		■			■		■	■	■
Regional military protocols for disaster assistance						■				■	■		
Regional web portal on DRM					■	■	■			■	■		■
Regional IDRL treaty/guidelines				■							■		
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>

DRR initiatives on the premise that preparedness and mitigation efforts will eventually reduce the effects of disasters and, hence, the need for costly humanitarian operations. Accordingly, SOPAC's budget is overwhelmingly financed by the European Union, with additional sizable contributions from Australia, New Zealand, France and the United States – all of which were founding members of the SPC (SOPAC, 2012). Likewise, CEPREDENAC receives funding from the United States, China, Japan, Spain and Switzerland, as well as from the European Commission, the World Bank, the IFRC and a number of NGOs. In 2010, the most recent year for which public data is available, it received \$780,000 from the Japanese government alone (JICA, 2012; AidData 2.0, 2013).

Reliant on external financing, regional organisations have generally not acted as donors except in minor instances, financing national efforts (often with funding from the United Nations or the EU). This reflects not only a dearth of funding but also the size, scale, contextual specificity and cost of disaster risk reduction projects.

### 4.3 Conflict management

While regional organisations have taken on humanitarian assistance and DRR-related activities in recent years, as primarily political and diplomatic entities they have long engaged with conflicts and their repercussions. The previously discussed principle of subsidiarity has long been applied to conflict, with researchers and policymakers both noting regional organisations' potential to intervene in conflicts in ways – given their understanding of conflict dynamics and cultures – not necessarily feasible for the United Nations or individual nations (Pugh and Sidhu, 2003; Boutros-Ghali, 1992; Brahimi, 2000). As discussed below, this has particularly (but not exclusively) applied to Africa, which is on the whole less wed to national sovereignty concerns and where conflicts in one country have a long history of spreading across borders. However, the Arab League, generally a defender of state sovereignty, took the extraordinary step of requesting international military action (the establishment of a no-fly zone) over Libya in 2011. While the League's action on Libya appeared out of character for the organisation, it reflected many Arab leaders' personal animosity towards Libyan President Muammar Gadhafi and their growing concern about his erratic style of leadership; the League was further

bolstered by deep concern among Arab populations over the regime's attacks on civilians. Other regional organisations have also sought to protect civilians and reduce conflict tensions. The OAS is supporting negotiations between the Colombian government and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) (Meyer, 2013: 9), and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is becoming increasingly involved in addressing regional security challenges and associated issues (e.g. preventive diplomacy, defence cooperation).

Here conflict management is defined as efforts to prevent conflict and, once it has emerged, to resolve it and mitigate its destructive impact (Wallensteen, 2002). Hence, the term is used to refer to a wide range of interventions, including conflict monitoring and early warning, conflict resolution and mediation, peacekeeping and the protection of civilians in armed conflict. While broader regional integration and economic cooperation may have ancillary benefits for peace and the management of armed violence (see Annawitt, 2010), this section only addresses those interventions which are overtly aimed at mitigating conflict.

Regional institutions have developed policies and structures for conflict management. The ARF, an extension of ASEAN, was established in 1994 in order to help the regional body address sensitive diplomatic and security issues separately from its generally less confrontational summits and high-level meetings (Whelan, 2012). In Latin America, the OAS created The Fund for Peace: Peaceful Settlement of Territorial Disputes, more commonly referred to as the OAS Peace Fund (OAS, 2000), in 2000. Across Africa, initiatives and institutions are too numerous to note here. They range from the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) and Panel of the Wise to ECOWAS' Conflict Prevention Framework and SADC's Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation (Zyck and Muggah, 2012). Standing peacekeeping forces have also been established, primarily under the auspices of the AU Standby Force (ASF), and the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) has been particularly active in West Africa, though SADC's Standby Brigade (SADCBRIG) has been largely inactive since it was established in 2004 (de Carvalho et al., 2010). Broader peace and conflict efforts in Africa have also been informed by conflict early warning systems, from the pan-African Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) to IGAD's Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) in East Africa and SADC's Regional Early Warning System (REWS). (For a comprehensive treatment of these

**Table 4: Activities related to conflict management**

Activity	AU	ECOWAS	SADC	OAS	SICA	CARICOM	CAN	LAS	SAARC	ASEAN	SPC
Coordinating conflict early warning systems	■	■	■								
Research and/or regional lessons learning	■	■								■	■
Training/capacity-building on conflict management	■	■	■	■						■	
Engagement in conflict resolution/mediation	■	■	■	■				■	■	■	
Peacekeeping with protection focus	■	■	■								

Key: ■ Clear role/contribution ■ Partial role/contribution

systems, see Wulf and Debiel (2009).) Of course, as discussed below, institutionalisation has not necessarily correlated with activity, effectiveness or impact.

As with the other sectors and issues, progress has been highly uneven among regional organisations. As evident in Table 4, regional organisations in the Americas and the Caribbean have had relatively little engagement with conflict management. CARICOM has regularly discussed intra-Caribbean disputes over shared waters and resources, though these have never been raised to the level of mediation or conflict resolution. The OAS stands out as an exception, though it has primarily tended to play a supportive role and the organisation has never been at the helm of peace talks. Its Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia (MAPP) has, since 2004, helped to facilitate talks and offered to provide verification of disarmament and demobilisation efforts. The OAS has also helped to build mediation capacity and, through its Peace Fund, provided technical support to bilateral (mostly territory-related) disputes among OAS members. Its most significant test came with the ousting in 2009 of President Manuel Zelaya in Honduras; however, the OAS was slow to respond to the crisis and, despite bringing some diplomatic pressure to bear, achieved no significant impact (Meyer, 2013).

The Arab League has been closely involved in mediating conflicts since at least the Lebanese civil war in the 1970s and 1980s, when Saudi Arabia and Syria negotiated the Taif Agreement under a nominal League mandate (Pinfari, 2009).<sup>14</sup> Arab League mediators were unsuccessful in brokering a deal among Lebanese

<sup>14</sup> Despite the Arab League mandate, credit for the negotiations is normally given to Saudi Arabia and Syria, which were able to bring about change given their relations with factions in Lebanon. However, the Arab League provided a forum for the two countries to channel their diplomatic efforts.

#### Box 4: Regional organisations' mediation efforts and outcomes

Several studies going back to the Second World War have found that, of regional organisations' mediation efforts, only a small fraction have been successful. For instance, Nye (1971) examined the effectiveness of the OAS, OAU and Arab League in managing 19 conflicts between 1948 and 1970. Weighting these conflicts based on their complexity and intensity, he concluded that the OAS had performed rather well as a mediator, while the OAU was perhaps middling; the Arab League was deemed to have been the least effective in resolving conflicts. Different findings were reached by Zacher (1979), who examined 116 conflicts between 1946 and 1977. That study found that the OAU had successfully mediated 37% of the conflicts in its region while the OAS (19%), Arab League (12%) and United Nations (9%) had fared far worse. The Arab League's difficulties in acting as a mediator were further noted by Awad (1994), who found that the body had successfully mediated only six of 77 conflicts which it had attempted to settle between 1945 and 1981.

factions in December 2006, though they were able to bring about a peaceful resolution to that country's presidential crisis in 2007 and 2008 (*ibid.*). More recently, since the Arab uprisings, the League has attempted to mediate conflicts in Egypt, Libya and Syria (Masters, 2013). It is also involved in a new round of planning for peace talks between the Israelis and Palestinians. However, its effectiveness has long been called into question, and the Israeli government has implicitly refused to participate in negotiations

## Box 5: The role of the Gulf Cooperation Council in Yemen's transition

The GCC, predominantly a political discussion forum and customs union, took up a new role as mediator in Yemen during the Arab uprisings. It developed a transition plan under which President Ali Abdullah Saleh would step down, ceding authority to his deputy, who would be committed to future elections and a National Dialogue process which would tackle contentious domestic issues and produce a new constitution (Burke, 2012; 2013). Despite flaws in implementation, the GCC initiative has been praised as a least-bad outcome for the Arab world's poorest country. That said, analysts have noted that the agreement benefited from a fortunate confluence of circumstances: Saudi Arabia's longstanding relations with the sitting Yemeni president, Qatar's support for particular opposition groups in Yemen and the GCC's broader concern that prolonged protest and political violence in Yemen could spread to its neighbours or create opportunities for extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (Zyck, 2013).

involving the League (The Economist, 11 May 2013). Since the Arab uprisings of 2011, the League has not successfully mediated a single conflict – despite a flurry of renewed diplomatic engagement (Küçükkeles, 2012). The OIC has also faced difficulty in mediating conflicts, though it has reportedly attained some limited success in calling for moderation in Mindanao since the 1970s and enabling humanitarian access in Somalia (Sharqieh, 2012). Among Islamic and Middle Eastern regional organisations' recent mediation efforts, only the GCC's negotiated transition in Yemen – its first experience of mediating in a conflict – might be called a (qualified) success (see Box 6).

Asian regional organisations have been among the least active in preventing and responding to conflicts. Despite the prevalence of conflict in South Asia, SAARC has not engaged in conflict management (Jetly, 2003), although informal, high-level talks on the sidelines of SAARC summits have facilitated a reduction in tensions, particularly between India and Pakistan (Sridharan, 2008). ASEAN has been in much the same position, rarely discussing conflicts openly

but instead applying informal pressure on its members. ASEAN has long sought to persuade the rulers of Myanmar to open up to the international community and their own domestic opposition (*ibid.*), and individual ASEAN member states have been involved in mediation and peace agreement monitoring in Aceh, southern Thailand and Mindanao (Odaira, 2009; Wandji, 2010). ASEAN has proposed an Institute for Peace and Reconciliation, and could be poised to engage more overtly with conflict management (Cristescu, Nicolescu and Wandji, 2012). However, with the principle of non-violence enshrined in its charter (Hara, 2012), these developments are unlikely to lead to the sorts of regional peacekeeping efforts seen elsewhere.

Only Africa has a significant, demonstrated record of direct and overt involvement in conflict management in relation to research, training and, most importantly, diplomatic and military interventions. The AU has launched a number of independent peacekeeping missions, including in Burundi (2003), Sudan/Darfur (2004), Somalia (2007) and, with ECOWAS, Mali (2013), many of which were ultimately taken over or conducted in partnership with the United Nations. Citing the responsibility to protect (R2P), the AU's Peace and Security Council has deployed peacekeepers and only pursued UN approval at a later stage (Paiwal, 2010). Indeed, there appears to be a growing trend in African peacekeeping: AU (or ECOWAS) forces intervene in a conflict or situation with limited resources and limited UN backing; once they encounter easily anticipated challenges or resource constraints, the United Nations feels compelled to act and shores up the African mission, partners with it or subsumes it under a UN mandate.

This scenario has repeatedly played itself out in West Africa, where ECOWAS has become closely involved in conflict management on multiple levels. Since ECOMOG's deployment of forces to Liberia in 1990, ECOWAS has developed a reputation as one of the most interventionist regional organisations in the world. Its deployment of forces in Côte d'Ivoire in late 2002 – alongside French troops and in the absence of UN approval – is credited with ending the conflict there and creating the conditions necessary for a peace agreement. To some extent, the organisation's threats to use force have grown so credible that, in 2009, ECOWAS helped to push the Guinean government to the negotiating table

by making preparations for a force to intervene there amid a harsh government crackdown against protesters (Stares and Zenkho, 2011). However, a similar approach failed in Côte d'Ivoire in 2010 (Yabi, 2012). Indeed, despite some prominent successes, ECOWAS' conflict management efforts have faced several challenges – in addition to being highly militarised. The organisation is reliant on Nigeria for upwards of 70% of its financing and troops, thus providing its largest member with a de facto veto over future operations (Pitts, 1999). More broadly, it has at times faced capacity problems; in late 2012 it estimated that it could field a force in Mali – after Islamist and Tuareg rebels had seized the north of the country – only nine months later (Security Council Report, 2013). It was eventually spurred into action by a French and Chadian intervention in Mali in January 2013, but it was only able to muster a few hundred soldiers after several weeks (overwhelmingly from Nigeria). As in previous cases, the regional force proved a spearhead for a UN mission, known as the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which absorbed the AU-backed ECOWAS mission in July 2013 (Zyck and Muggah, 2013).

Other regional institutions in Africa have been less able to contribute to conflict management. SADC has established several institutions related to conflict management, but is at a far earlier stage than the AU and ECOWAS, and many SADC conflict management institutions remain small (Essuman-Johnson, 2009) and dependent on South Africa (Møller, 2005).<sup>15</sup> Aside from limited mediation efforts in the DRC and the contribution of peacekeepers to the AU mission there, SADC has only intervened twice in regional conflicts. The first, in 1998 in Lesotho, remains a source of controversy. SADC's legal mandate to deploy peacekeepers has been called into question, and South Africa has been accused of launching the mission with inadequate justification and in order to help it ensure continued access to water via the Katse Dam (Cawthra, 2010). In the second instance, in Madagascar, SADC, in partnership with the AU, pushed for and mediated a political 'solution' after the elected president was overthrown by a rival. However, the agreement was soon violated (*ibid.*; Baker and Maeresera, 2009).

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15 SADC's Regional Peacekeeping Training Centre (RPTC) has a total of seven staff members (SADC, 2012).

## 4.4 Regional humanitarian action – analysis

As evident from the sections above, regional organisations have not engaged with different elements of humanitarian action to the same extent. Refugee issues have been tackled by nearly all organisations examined, and nearly all have a major and growing emphasis on DRR; however, conflict management has been addressed highly unevenly, with African regional organisations adopting a significantly more aggressive and comprehensive approach (e.g. involving monitoring, peacekeeping and mediation) than regional entities on other continents.

True to their purpose – and reflecting their limitations – regional organisations have not tended to act as donors or implementing agencies except in a small number of symbolic instances. Instead, as inter-governmental bodies, they have engaged in policy-level discussions, conducted assessment and research, developed lessons-learning systems and, to some extent, built capacities. Increasingly, these are being undertaken within dedicated departments and centres focused upon natural disasters and 'conflict early warning'. Such findings are unsurprising given the intent, objectives, resources and principles underlying regional organisations. They are unlikely to become donors and are ill-equipped to engage in more invasive activities.

Regional organisations appear much more likely to engage with an issue when it is framed in technical rather than legal terms, when it is based on international standards and processes, when monitoring mechanisms are put in place and when a region has a relatively similar level of vulnerability. Likewise, state sovereignty has played a crucial role – preventing particular regional organisations (e.g. ASEAN, SAARC) from entering into novel humanitarian terrain. On the issue of legal versus technical framing, consider the issue of refugees, which has seen limited and inconsistent engagement by many regional organisations. The issue had been cast in legal terms and, in the OAS and CAN, was addressed by legal entities. In SAARC, refugee issues in the region have not been addressed, and the ASEAN Regional Forum, while issuing several statements regarding the need to address refugee issues in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Korean Peninsula, has thus far sidestepped displacement in the region. In contrast, many of these organisations have been the most active in DRR



efforts, which they tend to view as technical challenges rather than obligations under international law. The same applies to conflict management, which saw its greatest burst of progress (e.g. the formation of early warning networks across the African continent) when regional organisations began seeing the issue as one of semi-scientific prediction.

Regional organisations appear to have addressed issues more comprehensively when, like the HFA, they contain a clear role for regional organisations and one which will be monitored regularly. It is undeniable that regional bodies' preparations for and response to the Hyogo process have driven DRR efforts at the regional level. The soft pressure implied by HFA monitoring at the national and regional levels has also been crucial. No similarly prominent international frameworks or monitoring processes apply to either refugee issues (or any other humanitarian sector) or conflict management.

Regional organisations also appear to have been particularly willing to engage with an issue when they share common risk profiles. In relation to DRR, regions which are genuinely contiguous and face shared vulnerabilities tend to be the most willing to cooperate on DRR. For instance, CARICOM and SICA have made tremendous progress given that they face a common threat; a single hurricane or tropical storm is likely to affect numerous countries in a discrete time period. In contrast, the OAS extends across a massive region where risks may range from landslides and drought in particular areas to

hurricanes and flooding elsewhere. For the LAS, while drought and water shortages are common across the region, some countries (e.g. oil-rich Gulf states) have the financial resources to mitigate their impacts, while others do not. Hence, a shared risk profile does not necessarily equate to a shared degree of vulnerability.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that, while regional organisations have begun to engage with a wide variety of humanitarian issues, the degree of commitment is not as strong as often advertised. Funding continues to come overwhelmingly from outside of the regions concerned. From ASEAN to CARICOM and the AU, external support – even when resources may be available from within the region – finances the vast majority of regional organisations' initiatives. The United Nations, for instance, finances the AU's mission in Somalia with nearly half a billion dollars per year (UNGA, 2013).

Furthermore, regional agreements have been ratified by only a small number of regional organisation members. For instance, the OAS' Inter-American Convention to Facilitate Disaster Assistance was adopted in 1991, but only ratified by six countries by 2013 (Ferris and Petz, 2013: 22). The ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (ADMER) also faced a multi-year ratification process before taking effect in 2009. Few Arab League members have signed on to regional DRR mechanisms. As the IFRC (2011) notes, these are not truly regional commitments, but a patchwork of agreements accepted by small numbers of countries.

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# 5 Conclusion: gaps in knowledge

Regional organisations have been the subject of increased attention in recent years. As Chapter 2 described, they have both come to embody and, in some instances, disprove their hypothetical benefits. That said, they are growing or planning to grow both in terms of institutions and activities, whether facilitating aid access, delivering assistance, attempting to mediate conflicts or launching protection-focused peacekeeping missions. Given that regional organisations' involvement in humanitarian action has, as noted in Chapter 3, been rapidly institutionalised, it is likely to persist and evolve. Hence, it is crucial to understand not only what they have previously done – as Chapter 4 has attempted to do – but also how they operate, set priorities, design interventions and measure their effectiveness. Furthermore, researchers must begin to identify the results they have achieved in order to highlight areas for improving their interventions and those of so-called 'traditional' aid actors in the United Nations and beyond. Indeed, research into regional organisations is not just about analysing and attempting to strengthen their performance – it is also about learning where they have developed new modes of operating which other actors may wish to adopt or build upon.

## 5.1 Key findings and implications

While there are many lingering questions regarding regional organisation (see 5.2, below), it is possible to identify a number of conclusions from the preceding review of the pertinent literature. First, other members of the international humanitarian community should use caution in approaching regional organisations as a coherent category of institutions with similar features. Each regional organisation is rooted in a unique historical and cultural context which influences how they view their role, how they make decisions and how they intervene (or not) in particular situations. Furthermore, each includes a constellation of political forces, whether the influence of the United States in the OAS, Nigeria in ECOWAS, South Africa in SADC and so on. These forces go beyond basic questions of hegemony versus multipolarity and reflect nuanced – and poorly understood – factors related to geography,

commerce, military power, the control of natural resources, identity and so on. Overarching strategies or approaches towards regional organisations as a whole are unlikely to be appropriate.

Second, there is a need to ensure that these political factors are considered in discussions of regional organisations' growing humanitarian role. A degree of political realism would help to temper the longstanding tendency among multilateral institutions, in particular, to praise regional involvement and present it, at times, as a panacea. As particular instances, such as SADC's intervention in Lesotho, imply, regional involvement may not always be beneficial. In other cases, such as the situation of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal and India, regional organisations can be used to close down important debates. The assumption that regional organisations will almost always be well-intentioned and well-informed interlocutors in particular situations does not appear to be borne out.

Third, while acknowledging the political dimensions of regional organisations, there are benefits in framing issues in technical rather than political or legalistic terms. Where regional organisations may have made a high degree of progress – such as DRR, climate monitoring, food security tracking and conflict early warning – the issues have generally been seen as technical. Similarly, research, capacity-building and lesson learning have been particular areas of strength for regional organisations. In contrast, they have been far less likely to engage with issues that the international community has clearly labelled as a political or legal matter. Hence, for instance, members of the international community may find they have a greater degree of success where they frame an issue – such as refugees – as a technical challenge bolstered by information systems and quasi-scientific standards. Such a tactic of course has limitations, but it may provide a means of engaging regional organisations on particular issues that they may otherwise be reluctant to take up.

Fourth, as one can learn from the HFA, international frameworks which specify a role for regional bodies,

which have fixed deadlines and which include regular monitoring processes at the regional level will be most likely to impel progress and follow-up. That said, instances such as the HFA also make it clear that ‘progress’ must increasingly be framed in tangible rather than institutional or policy-level terms in relation to not only DRR but also humanitarian action more broadly. At present regional organisations have tended to win praise for creating new institutions and establishing committees and policy frameworks without necessarily making any material contribution to the lives of vulnerable people and those affected by conflicts, natural disasters and other emergencies. Policy formulation and institution-building must eventually give rise to practical action at the local, national or regional levels – most of it under the purview of national governments – if regional organisations are to become significant humanitarian actors.

Fifth, it is clear that – despite hand-wringing about the relationship between regional and global institutions – there is already a high degree of interaction. The same countries which finance the United Nations or humanitarian agencies are also financing the bulk of regional organisations’ humanitarian efforts. This provides these donors with a degree of influence over regional entities. While perhaps useful in some respects, this influence has also limited the extent to which regional organisations are genuinely ‘regional’. Analysts and policymakers have repeatedly expressed hope that regional bodies (and other so-called ‘emerging’ aid actors) will introduce innovations and new models from which others may learn. However, the likelihood of original thinking may be reduced if they are too fully brought into the same international bureaucracy – with its established norms, processes and priorities – as most other actors in the sector. Likewise, and perhaps more troublingly, donor influence may create a difficult position in which regional organisations are financially pressured (or incentivised) to take on new challenges for which they are ill-prepared – or which do not fully interest their secretariats and member states. This would create a number of adverse outcomes and would place responsibility for key issues (e.g. emergency preparedness, the protection of civilians) in the hands of institutions unable or unwilling to genuinely follow through on them.

Nor, however, would it be correct to portray regional organisations simply as implementing agencies for the United Nations or bilateral donors (Baert, Felício and De Lombaerde, 2013). Indeed, certain

regional organisations have demonstrated a high degree of agency in their engagement with the broader humanitarian community. For instance, ECOWAS and the AU have intervened in conflicts – without UN authorisation – in a clear attempt to impel the United Nations to act. The same degree of independence and agency could perhaps be seen in the Arab League’s decision to authorise a no-fly zone over Libya, one of its (albeit suspended) members, in 2011. In doing so the League indirectly paved the way for a NATO military operation within the Arab world. Likewise, ASEAN was in many respects leading and legitimising the role of the United Nations and the broader humanitarian community in Myanmar following Cyclone Nargis. Conversely, regional organisations have also, at times, countered global priorities and agendas by taking minimal or symbolic actions, such as signing onto agreements that lacked monitoring plans or any hopes of meaningful enforcement. The manner in which they have done so – and the rationales for supporting or opposing particular issues – is one of several issues which require further research and analysis.

## 5.2 Lingerin g questions

As noted above, there is a wide range of questions which would benefit from further examination. This paper has, in reviewing the pertinent literature, identified several such gaps in knowledge. To this end, below are a number of questions which this broader project – ‘Zones of Engagement: Regional Action and Humanitarian Response’ – will address, and which other researchers may consider taking up to guide their own work on this issue. This list is not comprehensive, but seeks to identify a number of the most important gaps.

### 5.2.1 Concepts and principles

- How do regional organisations understand the concept of humanitarian action, and how do they view it in relation to separate notions of development cooperation, humanitarian intervention, statebuilding, stabilisation and so on? Are there distinct principles and norms that underpin and frame these understandings?
- In what ways do regional organisations’ implicit (and explicit) humanitarian principles and priorities differ from those of the UN, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and other actors within the existing humanitarian system?



### 5.2.2 Relations with other stakeholders

- To what extent have regional organisations helped to coordinate aid flows to crisis-affected contexts with multiple development partners? What scope is there for doing so, and how might they pursue enhanced coordination?
- How do local NGOs and civil society organisations in crisis-affected countries work with and perceive the activities of regional institutions?
- To what extent do donor agencies use their financial support for regional organisations to influence their work and priorities – either directly or indirectly?

### 5.2.3 Models of intervention

- What specific implementation models – e.g. financing mechanisms, partnership arrangements, aid conditions – do regional organisations employ when supporting humanitarian objectives?
- What specific approaches can regional organisations employ to intervene in a crisis without raising the ire of states which carefully guard their sovereignty?

### 5.2.4 Politics of regional relations

- What motivates regional organisations to become involved in a particular crisis, and how are decisions made to intervene in a particular crisis or not?
- Do regional organisations appear to be most capable of responding to crises (or particular types of crises) when there is a regional hegemon or when all members have a relatively similar level of influence over the institution? Are there certain forms of manifestations of hegemony within a region that are conducive to regional organisations' humanitarian role/performance?
- What institutional structures and mechanisms have been most effective in preventing political interests or relations from preventing (or blunting the effectiveness of) regional organisations' humanitarian activities?

### 5.2.5 Impact and measuring effectiveness

- What impact have regional organisations achieved when engaging with physical assistance related, for instance, to disaster response or risk mitigation?
- To what extent and how do regional organisations monitor and evaluate their activities? How do these compare with existing international monitoring and evaluation standards?
- To what extent have regional organisations been allocated roles or responsibilities that the United

Nations or major powers have the capability – but not the will – to undertake? In such instances, what forms of partnership have been most effective?

## 5.3 Reframing the debate

Responding to the questions above does not necessarily require new methods. Rather, as Luk Van Langenhove (2013) recently wrote, it will require the synthesis of methodologies and theoretical frameworks from a range of disciplines: international relations, comparative politics, economics and history as well as sociology and anthropology. Furthermore, noting the wide variety of institutional expansion which tends to accompany regionalism, there is an urgent need for public administration specialists to analyse and elucidate the formal and informal decision-making and accountability mechanisms which make up these increasingly complex bodies.

Returning to Chapter 2's focus on key concepts, understanding regional organisations requires new definitions as the topic has gradually migrated from the European experience to the developing and non-Western context. Note Haas' (1971: 6) oft-cited definition of regional integration studies as the examination of 'how and why states cease to be wholly sovereign, how and why they voluntarily mingle, merge, and mix with their neighbours so as to lose the factual attributes of sovereignty while acquiring new techniques for resolving conflict between themselves'. Such definitions, while perhaps applicable to the exceptional European experience with integration, do not appear to extend to regional organisations in developing countries, which often use regional institutions to defend their sovereignty while feigning deference to supranational concerns. Nor does a primary focus on sovereignty help us to answer the far more applied questions noted above (and briefly analysed within this paper). What are regional organisations doing, how are they doing it, and to what effect? Are they a growing force for change, or do they represent a means of bolstering existing regional economic, political, military and, more broadly, power relations? There is a need to more fully understand what regional organisations are before analysts, policymakers and international humanitarian professionals can begin to consider how they might engage with them in order to alleviate suffering, mitigate disaster risks and protect populations caught up in armed conflict.



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# Annex 1

## Membership, current and pending, in regional institutions

Region	Africa														Americas						Asia												Europe					Pac.		Total				
Organisation	AU	CEAC	CEMAC	CEN-SAD	CEPGL	COI	COMESA	EAC	ECOWAS	ICGLR	IGAD	MRU	SADC	UMA	CAN	CARICOM	MERCOSUR	OAS	SICA	UNASUR	APEC	ASEAN	BIMSTEC	CICA	CIS	CSTO	EurAsEc	GCC	GUAM	LAS	SAARC	SCO	EU	NATO	OSCE	RCC	OCO	PIF						
AFRICA																																									2			
Algeria	■																																										4	
Angola	■	■											■																															3
Benin	■			■					■																																			2
Botswana	■																																											3
Burkina Faso	■			■																																								6
Burundi	■	■			■																																							3
Cameroon	■	■																																										3
Cape Verde	■			■																																								3
CAR	■	■	■																																									5
Chad	■	■	■																																									4
Comoros	■			■																																								4
Congo	■	■																																										4
Côte d'Ivoire	■			■																																								4
DRC	■	■																																										7
Djibouti	■																																											4
Egypt	■			■																																								5
Equatorial Guinea	■	■																																										3
Eritrea	■			■																																								4
Ethiopia	■																																											3
Gabon	■			■																																								3
Gambia	■																																											3
Ghana	■			■																																								3
Guinea	■			■																																								4
Guinea-Bissau	■			■																																								3
Kenya	■			■				■																																				6
Lesotho	■																																											2
Liberia	■			■					■				■																															4

(continued)

### Membership, current and pending, in regional institutions (continued)

Region	Africa																				Americas								Asia										Europe					Pac.		
	AU	CEAC	CEMAC	CEN-SAD	CEPGL	COI	COMESA	EAC	ECOWAS	ICGLR	IGAD	MRU	SADC	UMA	CAN	CARICOM	MERCOSUR	OAS	SICA	UNASUR	APEC	ASEAN	BIMSTEC	CICA	CIS	CSTO	EurAsEc	GCC	GUAM	LAS	SAARC	SCO	EU	NATO	OSCE	RCC	OCO	PIF	Total							
Libya	■			■		■							■																													4				
Madagascar	■																																										3			
Malawi	■					■						■																															3			
Mali	■			■				■																																		3				
Mauritania	■			■									■																													4				
Mauritius	■					■																																				3				
Morocco				■										■																												4				
Mozambique	■														■																											2				
Namibia	■																																									2				
Niger	■			■				■																																		3				
Nigeria	■			■				■																																		3				
Rwanda	■			■											■																											5				
São Tomé & Príncipe	■	■		■																																							3			
Senegal	■								■																																		2			
Seychelles	■					■						■																															4			
Sierra Leone	■													■																													4			
Somalia	■			■																																						4				
South Africa	■																																									2				
South Sudan	■																																									4				
Sudan	■			■																																						5				
Swaziland	■																																										3			
Tanzania	■																																										4			
Togo	■			■					■																																		3			
Tunisia	■			■																																							3			
Uganda	■																																										5			
Zambia	■																																										4			
Zimbabwe	■																																										3			
Réunion (France)																																											1			
SADR	■																																										1			

Region	Africa												Americas						Asia						Europe					Pac.		Total												
	AU	CEAC	CEMAC	CEN-SAD	CEPGL	COI	COMESA	EAC	ECOWAS	ICGLR	IGAD	MRU	SADC	UMA	CAN	CARICOM	MERCOSUR	OAS	SICA	UNASUR	APEC	ASEAN	BIMSTEC	CICA	CIS	CSTO	EurAsEc	GCC	GUAM	LAS	SAARC		SCO	EU	NATO	OSCE	RCC	OCO	PIF					
Antigua & Barbuda																■		■		■																								
Argentina																	■																											
Bahamas																■																												
Barbados																■		■																										
Belize																■																												
Bolivia																	■																											
Brazil																	■																											
Canada																																											■	
Chile																																												
Colombia																																												
Costa Rica																																												
Cuba																																												
Dominica																																												
Dominican Republic																																												
Ecuador																																												
El Salvador																																												
Grenada																																												
Guatemala																																												
Guyana																																												
Haiti																																												
Honduras																																												
Jamaica																																												
Mexico																																												
Nicaragua																																												
Panama																																												
Paraguay																																												
Peru																																												
St. Kitts and Nevis																																												

(continued)

## Membership, current and pending, in regional institutions (continued)

Region	Africa	Americas	Asia	Europe	Pac.	Total
Organisation	AU CEAC CEMAC CEN-SAD CEPGL COI COMESA EAC ECOWAS IGLR IGAD MRU SADC UMA	CAN CARICOM MERCOSUR OAS SICA UNASUR	APEC ASEAN BIMSTEC CICA CIS CSTO EurAsEc GCC GUAM LAS SAARC SCO	EU NATO OSCE RCC	OCO PFI	
St. Lucia		■				2
Suriname		■				3
SVG		■				2
Trinidad & Tobago		■				2
United States		■	■	■		5
Uruguay		■				3
Venezuela		■				3
Montserrat		■				1
Puerto Rico						0
<b>ASIA</b>						
Afghanistan			■			2
Armenia			■	■		3
Azerbaijan			■	■		4
Bahrain			■			3
Bangladesh						2
Bhutan			■			2
Brunei			■			2
Cambodia			■			2
China			■			3
Cyprus			■	■		2
Georgia				■		2
India			■			3
Indonesia			■			2
Iran						1
Iraq						2
Israel			■			1
Japan			■			1
Jordan						3

Region	Africa														Americas					Asia											Europe					Pac.		Total											
	AU	CEAC	CEMAC	CEN-SAD	CEPGL	COI	COMESA	EAC	ECOWAS	ICGLR	IGAD	MRU	SADC	UMA	CAN	CARICOM	MERCOSUR	OAS	SICA	UNASUR	APEC	ASEAN	BIMSTEC	CICA	CIS	CSTO	EurAsEc	GCC	GUAM	LAS	SAARC	SCO	EU	NATO	OSCE	RCC	OCO		PF										
Kazakhstan																																											6						
Kuwait																																															2		
Kyrgyzstan																																															6		
Laos																																															1		
Lebanon																																															1		
Malaysia																																															2		
Maldives																																															1		
Mongolia																																															2		
Myanmar																																															2		
Nepal																																															2		
North Korea																																															0		
Oman																																															2		
Pakistan																																															2		
Philippines																																																2	
Qatar																																																2	
Saudi Arabia																																																2	
Singapore																																																2	
South Korea																																															2		
Sri Lanka																																															2		
Syria																																																1	
Tajikistan																																																6	
Thailand																																																4	
Timor-Leste																																																2	
Turkey																																																	5
Turkmenistan																																																	1
UAE																																																3	
Uzbekistan																																																6	
Vietnam																																																3	
Yemen																																																	1

(continued)







## Membership, current and pending, in regional institutions (continued)

Region	Africa													Americas										Asia										Europe				Pac.		Total							
	AU	CEAC	CEMAC	CEN-SAD	CEPGL	COI	COMESA	EAC	ECOWAS	ICGLR	IGAD	MRU	SADC	UMA	CAN	CARICOM	MERCOSUR	OAS	SICA	UNASUR	APEC	ASEAN	BIMSTEC	CICA	CIS	CSTO	EurAsEc	GCC	GUAM	LAS	SAARC	SCO	EU	NATO	OSCE	RCC	OCO	PIF									
Papua New Guinea																					■																			■	■	3					
Samoa																																											■	■	2		
Solomon Islands																																											■	■	2		
Tonga																																											■	■	2		
Tuvalu																																											■	■	2		
Vanuatu																																											■	■	2		
American Samoa																																												■	■	1	
CNMI																																												■	■	1	
Cook Islands																																											■	■	2		
French Polynesia																																												■	■	1	
Guam																																												■	■	1	
New Caledonia																																													■	■	1
Niue																																												■	■	2	
Norfolk Island																																													■	■	1
Wallis and Futuna																																												■	■	1	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>16</b>			<b>-</b>				



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