



20th ALNAP Biannual Meeting

Discussion Paper

10 Years On: Achievements and future challenges

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1 Introduction

ALNAP will celebrate its 10th birthday in 2007. This short paper presents a personal view of ALNAP's achievements to date, and outlines some of the strategic challenges that ALNAP is likely to face in the future. The paper also provides a basis for discussions at the Rome Biannual Meeting, which will in turn represent a first step towards a new visioning process and five-year strategy.

1.1 Brief background and history

The 1996 Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda (JEEAR) led directly or indirectly to the creation of a number of initiatives intended to improve the accountability and performance of humanitarian action. SPHERE, the Ombudsman Project (now the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership) and People in Aid focused on the development of standards and self-regulatory mechanisms. ALNAP was envisaged as a sector-wide network designed to improve learning and ultimately performance. The unique design feature of ALNAP was that its membership was drawn from a broad spectrum of organisations and people considered to be key actors in the humanitarian system. These included UN agencies, international NGOs, donor governments, the Red Cross Movement, academics and researchers. (Annex A below provides a complete list of Full Members.)

The founders of ALNAP included John Borton (then an ODI research fellow and one of the JEEAR team leaders), Dr Mukesh Kapila (then head of DFID's Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department, CHAD) and Niels Dabelstein (head of DANIDA's Evaluation Secretariat). Their vision centred on providing the humanitarian system with a standing forum in which learning could be shared between all main stakeholders and where better understanding and shared approaches to common challenges could be developed and implemented. The JEEAR had revealed a great deal of defensiveness in humanitarian organisations and this had acted as a real barrier to learning and change.

ALNAP's Full Membership was initially capped at 30 in order to protect the intimacy and trust necessary for frank and open discussions between peers. ALNAP members were to be equal co-owners, and trust was identified as essential to ensure a safe environment in which innovative ideas could be shared. As a network organisation, ALNAP was designed to have a 'light' organisational structure and be responsive to emerging challenges. It was set up to be relatively free of the red tape that appeared to restrict many other, more established agencies.

ALNAP as a concept caught on almost immediately and new organisations and people became attracted to the idea and wanted to be part of it. Consequently, an inherent tension soon emerged between the pressure to increase members (inclusiveness) and the intimacy required to maintain trusting relationships. In 1998 a new tier of membership was created (Observer Membership) and by 2001 Full Membership was at 51. Today, the ceiling has been raised to 60. The basic governance and organisational structure however have remained unchanged since ALNAP's inception.

ALNAP's Vision paper of February 2002 (Annex B below) is largely predicated on the understanding that improved performance depends on a range of different inputs

delivered by different parts of the system. Improved learning, accountability and quality are clearly part of the improvement process but are each themselves multifaceted concepts influenced in turn by a range of variables and circumstances. Given its sector-wide composition, an important role for ALNAP is to provide a forum for promoting all the elements that combine to improve performance. Thus, ALNAP's vision is to: **'foster a culture of active learning, accountability and quality throughout the sector to facilitate improved performance'**.

1.2 Past achievements and future challenges

With reference to the ALNAP Vision paper (Annex B), the present paper will now outline some of ALNAP's clearest achievements and will identify some of the key challenges likely to emerge in future. This analysis will be grouped in three sections: ALNAP's development as a network organisation; ALNAP outputs and products; and ALNAP's influence and impact on the humanitarian system.

2 Organisational development

2.1 Funding

Perhaps the most objective test for the success of any organisation is its financial situation. In this respect, ALNAP has been very successful, with a funding base growing steadily each year from its target of £100,000 in 1997 to around £450,000 today. The number of agencies subscribing has risen steadily from DFID's first grant in 1997 to 32 subscribers today. Over the past four years, ALNAP has substantially increased its multi-annual subscriptions. In 2002, all funding was made on an annual basis and today 14 agencies are making multi-annual subscriptions.

ALNAP has also solved an old cash-flow problem (from 1997–2002), which required the Overseas Development Institute to provide bridging funds to cover a period of 3–4 months. ALNAP's financial management processes have been improved and for the past four years cash flow has been stable. Indeed, in certain instances ALNAP has the potential to cover minor shortfalls in related initiatives such as the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC).

There has been one main change to funding arrangements: ALNAP Full Member Organisations are now required to make a subscription, which is based on a sliding scale developed by a sub-committee on membership. Funding for most Full Members is thus no longer voluntary. ALNAP has now evolved into a membership organisation in a financial sense (that is, with members providing 100 per cent funding through mandatory subscriptions). This has created an extra level of security for funding and allows for more forward planning and a more responsive approach. It has also changed the nature of ALNAP's organisational structure from being a voluntary network to something more akin to a professional association (see Section 2.2). This means that ALNAP does not need additional funding through external donors – as donor organisations are themselves members. To the best of my knowledge, ALNAP has thus become the only humanitarian network organisation to function in this way, as other networks or membership organisations are funded either by external donors or by a combination of external donors and membership subscriptions.

In sum, due to the rising number of funding agencies, the high percentage of pledges received and the increase in multi-annual funding, it seems more than reasonable to assume that ALNAP Members perceive the network as relevant and useful and, as a result, are happy to pay for it. The challenge will now be to maintain the breadth, depth and timeliness of the funding base.

2.2 Membership

ALNAP's unique feature is its sector-wide membership. The first requirement for achieving the Vision is that members are 'proactive, engaged, co-owners'. There is little doubt that a significant majority of members have indeed played their part so far but, at the same time, it is important to recognise the everyday realities of working life. As the 2004 DFID evaluation of ALNAP (Reference 1 below) points out, 'given the lack of spare time in ALNAP's membership, being too demanding is unwise'. Overall however, the level of participation on a wide range of ALNAP peer-review groups and advisory groups, as well as exceptionally high levels of return custom at biannual meetings, suggests that this balance is being struck. The future challenge will be maintaining relationships to provide a critical mass of proactive engagement.

One of the requirements for achieving its Vision is that ALNAP should 'raise Full Member numbers, while ensuring intimacy and familiarity are not unduly affected'. The DFID evaluation states that 'ALNAP's membership is impressively stable; only three organisations have left ALNAP since 1997'; and there has been steady growth accompanied by guidance provided by a sub-committee on membership (see Annex A for the list of Full Members).

Another requirement for realising the Vision is to 'increase engagement of ALNAP Observer Members as a key ALNAP asset'. In June 2004 at Copenhagen, ALNAP opened Day 1 of the biannual meeting to Observer Members, and has continued to do so. Demand to attend has been quite high and steady, and feedback from biannual meetings shows a high level of satisfaction from Observer Members.

However, there are other requirements for achieving the Vision that remain to be met. One of these involves the numbers of Southern organisations in the network. The Vision paper states that ALNAP needs to 'increase representation of "southern" organisations in the membership'. This issue was taken up directly in the 13th Biannual, in London in May 2003, where the membership decided between a number of structural options for ALNAP. One of the options was to 'increase levels of membership by developing categories of new members for southern based membership' (presentation at biannual). At the time it was decided not to pursue this option. The issue was also picked up in the DFID evaluation and, although it is beyond the scope of this paper to rehearse all the elements of this debate, this is likely to be a recurring theme.

In 2002 ALNAP made an explicit decision to hold a biannual in the 'South' (in New Delhi, hosted by AIDMI) and since then one biannual has been held in Nairobi (hosted by CARE) and one is planned for Dakar (hosted by OCHA). Meetings in the South provide additional opportunity for Southern inputs and participation within ALNAP and, given the positive feedback from these meetings, ALNAP will adopt the

practice of actively seeking Southern venues in the future (although this alone does not address the issue of Southern membership).

Another requirement of the ALNAP Vision is to do with the level of organisational representation at biannual meetings. The Vision paper requires ALNAP to 'increase engagement of senior personnel at Biannual meetings and in activities'. However, opinions are divided on this issue, as the DFID evaluation explains:

the more senior the person the more likely they are to influence policy but less likely to find the time to disseminate. It is impossible to say what type of representative is best placed to disseminate ALNAP's learning and influence practice; it is highly dependent upon the particular size, structure and culture of each organisation. Neither can one person do it all.'

(Reference 1, p 30)

This debate is likely to continue. The challenge will be to find ways to increase the involvement of senior personnel, thereby optimising the potential for influencing the higher-level policy agenda.

As mentioned in Section 2.1, ALNAP has evolved into a network organisation run by subscriptions. In this context, it is probably worth reminding ourselves of the discussion that took place at the 13th Biannual. One of the options under discussion was for ALNAP to move away from a network towards something more like a professional association. It was decided that the ALNAP character and structure should remain as it was, but there may be some now who would like to revisit this idea.

2.3 Governance and management structure

The steering committee, set up in 1997, is ALNAP's executive body, and meets four times a year. The system of election by email ballot has worked well, and attendance has been consistently high at meetings. The steering committee has effectively overseen changes and modification in organisational structure through work carried out by sub-committees and regular updating of ALNAP's Membership Guide.

The only real issue to have arisen with regard to governance (identified by the DFID evaluation) concerned the processes by which agendas were drawn up, how decisions were made and how they were communicated to the membership. This has been acted upon and minutes of steering-committee meetings are finalised earlier and are now made available to the membership, while a bi-monthly bulletin is also circulated to the membership. This appears to have largely dealt with this issue.

In the future, challenges may emerge as a consequence of ALNAP's growth. With up to 60 Full Members, issues of representation on the steering committee may arise, and the steering committee may need to be expanded. There may also be an argument for bringing in a high-ranking 'figurehead chair' to chair Biannual meetings and complement the chair of the steering committee who may be more concerned with business matters. Whatever course of action is chosen, the underlying challenge will be to maintain high levels of trust, commitment and cooperation in an expanding structure.

2.4 Secretariat

The ability of the ALNAP Secretariat to carry out its function is one of the pivotal elements required for ALNAP to achieve its Vision. The Secretariat has a dual role: it acts as a facilitator for generating energy and ideas within the network, and it also implements and manages all core activities in the ALNAP workplan. As agreed at the 13th Biannual Meeting, the Secretariat should be light and relatively inexpensive but should still be able to carry out the above functions. Although this aim is obviously desirable, the Secretariat has in practice been ‘persistently overloaded’ (DFID evaluation) and subject to unexpectedly major increases in workload such as the management and facilitation of the TEC in 2005–6.

Having a well-functioning hub at the heart of the network brings obvious benefits – the setting up and management of substantive elements of the TEC is one example – but there are also drawbacks. The management of such a big undertaking as the TEC brings with it both personal and institutional pressures. The rapid recruitment of key personnel expected to produce massive outputs within limited time-frames is a big ask, and ALNAP’s ongoing workplan is likely to suffer as a result of time/personnel being diverted from core tasks.

The Vision paper notes that ‘the Secretariat capacity should be regularly reviewed and adjusted to ensure it remains appropriate to the demands of approved activities’. This precisely describes the challenge for the future.

2.5 Biannual meetings

The DFID evaluation of ALNAP (Reference 1) states:

Each organisation’s level of attendance at the meetings is remarkably high. On average, members have attended 69 per cent of the biannuals and half have attended more than 73 per cent. There is a discernible correlation between attendance patterns and organisational types (UN, donor, NGO, Red Cross, consultant). Of the 10 highest attendance rates, over half are NGOs; of the lowest nearly half are donors. Other groups are as likely to be in either category.

The evaluation goes on to look at which individuals come to biannuals:

Of the Full Members, some individuals (approximately 15 per cent) have demonstrated remarkable attendance rates, coming to over two thirds of the meetings, indicating high individual and organisational commitment. Overall, a third of the representatives have attended 50 per cent or more and a further third have been to at least 30 per cent... These patterns of attendance are corroborated by interviews, suggesting that ALNAP has attained a relevance and status within the sector that generates stable organisational membership.

As noted above, Observer Members are now also invited to attend the first day of each Biannual meeting.

It seems that the trust and intimate approach postulated by the founders of ALNAP is still in evidence today, as shown by the high levels of repeat custom. Another reason for sustained involvement, as regularly borne out by biannual feedback forms, is that the vast majority of participants see the meetings as useful and relevant, providing not

only interesting debate and sharing of ideas, but also an excellent opportunity for networking. Indeed, this ‘networking space’ is often cited as being of special importance.

The main challenge for the future will be to maintain and possibly improve the levels of participant satisfaction at the biannual meetings. This will depend upon creating enough time for thorough planning of biannual meetings.

3 ALNAP’s outputs and products

Another of the Vision requirements is for ALNAP to have a ‘Demonstrable impact on accountability and quality within the humanitarian sector’, and ‘ALNAP needs to develop monitoring and evaluative mechanisms to allow members to demonstrate their impact on sectorwide quality and accountability and hence ALNAP’s added value’. The DFID evaluation notes the importance of Full Member representatives in this respect and also highlights some of the difficulties and limitations around this aspiration (p 30).

Clearly, there are huge methodological challenges related to assessing impact, and this is also considered in Section 4 below. The DFID evaluation also highlights the fact that ALNAP has ‘developed as a product driven network with an impressive output of high quality products’ and it is possible to reflect in more general terms on the likely influence that ALNAP has had in improving learning, accountability and performance in a number of key areas.

3.1 Evaluation of humanitarian action

There is little doubt that ALNAP is a market leader in promoting and improving evaluations, and the culmination of 10 years’ work has made a significant contribution to the understanding and uptake of evaluations in the sector. In ALNAP’s first Review of Humanitarian Action (RHA), John Borton and Raymond Apthorpe noted that evaluations of humanitarian action were not ingrained in the system. This situation has clearly changed a great deal and the forthcoming RHA chapter on the utilisation of evaluations points out that ‘evaluation has become the most visible feature on the accountability agenda’. Indeed, the growth has risen to a level where ‘anecdotal evidence suggests there may now even be too many single agency, single sector evaluations, especially in the aftermath of large scale emergency operations’ (*RHA in 2004*).

It is safe to assume that ALNAP’s cumulative work in this area has helped to put evaluations on the map and has prompted the growth of evaluations in the humanitarian sector. It is also reasonable to interpret this as a good thing, as it demonstrates a collective desire in the system to improve learning, accountability and performance. But a deeper question of course is what the real effect has been, as more does not necessarily equal better. Part of the answer will be related to questions of quality and utility. ALNAP’s meta-evaluation suggests that the overall quality of evaluation reports has remained generally poor, but with some notable improvements in some specific technical areas. Despite these improvements however, the bottom-line message is that quality has seriously lagged behind quantity.

Perhaps even more important is the question of whether evaluations have been well utilised to improve learning, accountability and ultimately performance. ALNAP's recent study on utilisation does a good job of explaining the complexities around this issue but does not duck the fact that 'the picture of utilisation that emerges from this and other studies is patchy and even dismal'. It is hard not to escape the high probability that, even though there are many more evaluations than before, the quality of the reports and the utilisation of recommendations have been found to be rather poor. On this basis one would have to assume that it is unlikely that the evaluation boom has resulted in a significant impact on humanitarian performance.

So, what has ALNAP achieved with respect to evaluation? Perhaps surprisingly, the answer is quite a lot. Putting aside the increasing volume of evaluations, ALNAP has developed the proforma and meta-evaluation as a way of monitoring the quality of evaluation reports. This has allowed the system to be well sighted as to if and how evaluations are improving – something that was seriously lacking before. ALNAP's evaluation training modules, developed in 2001/02 and updated regularly thereafter, have been available free of charge and have been used in many training exercises – there is good reason to believe that they have made a contribution to the sum total of knowledge and learning about evaluation.

The evaluation synthesis, published annually in the RHA, has provided a useful method for the sector to reflect on its performance. We are aware of its methodological and evidential limitations, but nonetheless over the past six years it has been possible to help consolidate a broad understanding of the main constraints and challenges to improving humanitarian action. It has also consolidated our understanding of what works well. This is a vital function, and ALNAP has provided the system with a platform that it lacked previously. That is not to say that the lessons have been acted upon and translated into better practice (there is little evidence to suggest that this is the case), but the cumulative effects of producing ongoing analysis adds to the momentum for debate and action, which is a necessary precursor for change.

ALNAP's papers on lessons learned, written from material from the ALNAP Evaluative Reports Database (ERD) directly after major, rapid-onset emergencies, have proved to be very popular – as shown by the increased activity on the website after posting of the papers. ALNAP will adopt the practice of producing more papers in 'real time' as a way of influencing practice as it happens.

Probably the biggest challenge for ALNAP in the future is to adopt a 'utilisation-focused' approach to evaluations in order to help provide the missing links between the process of evaluation and the take-up of learning and improved practice.

Perhaps the most visible recent achievement is ALNAP's support to the TEC: ALNAP was able to instigate, facilitate, provide top-up funds for and manage major components of the Coalition. In this way, ALNAP has demonstrated that it can provide a solid organisational foundation from which to run joint evaluations in the future. It remains to be seen whether the TEC will generate the same kinds of changes as did the JEEAR, but the TEC products have been widely distributed and the process has a reputation, great visibility and has created widespread debate.

3.2 Protection, participation and learning

The ALNAP guide on Protection has been ALNAP's most popular product, with an initial distribution of 2,500 copies and current distribution taken over by Oxfam Publishing. The reason for this is simply that ALNAP identified a gap in the market (the lack of a guide on protection) and filled it effectively with a good product. Several agencies have been involved in piloting the guide and many others have used it for training. It has helped to improve understanding of this issue across the sector, and we have seen it appear in the meta-evaluations as one of the improvements noted in humanitarian evaluation. The bigger question of whether the system is any better at protecting those people vulnerable to abuses and violence has not yet been answered. Indeed, the findings from the Darfur synthesis in the *RHA in 2004* suggest that there has been little impact on the ground, although agencies are clearly more cognisant of the issue. It is probable that the ALNAP guide has made a modest contribution to the latter.

The Global Study on Participation similarly filled a gap in the market by providing a Practitioners' Guide, which has been piloted by several agencies and widely distributed across the sector. A modified version is due to be published and distributed by Oxfam Publishing, and a total of six country monographs from the study have also been published. At the most straightforward level, feedback from those agencies involved in the study suggests that field personnel have welcomed the guide and have found it of practical use.

There is no conclusive evidence one way or the other of whether participation in humanitarian action is better understood and more widely practised, but there is little doubt that the issue now occupies a more prominent place on the agenda and in the rhetoric of senior humanitarian officials. For example, a recent Inquiry by the UK Parliament's International Development Committee (Reference 2) recommends that DFID 'clarifies its approach for ensuring the involvement of beneficiaries in the design, monitoring and evaluation of its humanitarian activities, and affirm its commitment to tackling this issue at headquarters as well as field level' (Recommendation 23, p 78).

One of the big challenges for the future will be to ensure that ALNAP's products have practical utility and a genuine relevance for operational personnel.

The concept of the Learning Support Office piloted in Malawi also provided the sector with valuable experience about the practicalities of field-based learning. This experiment is to some extent a manifestation of aspirations from the early days of ALNAP, which help to emphasise the importance of innovation and trying out new ideas.

In sum, on the basis of the achievements outlined above (both organisational and products) one can concur with the main finding from the DFID evaluation that ALNAP:

is a well-functioning network that has demonstrated a high degree of productivity and an impressive willingness to adapt its approach and focus in line with the sector's needs. The extent to which its members participate in its fora, support it

through funding and make use of its resources indicate that it is judged a relevant mechanism through which to improve performance.
(Reference 1, p 33)

However, this is only the first step, and ALNAP's next 10 years should be judged more according to improvements in the system itself. The next section begins to outline some of the challenges involved in this.

4 Influence and impact on the humanitarian system

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, a number of initiatives to improve accountability and performance were created after the JEEAR. Inevitably, questions have been asked about what they are achieving. These questions have become more pressing in the light of the TEC evaluation that, after a highly critical analysis of humanitarian performance, calls for fundamental change in the system.

Even before the TEC, the DFID evaluation pointed out that 'ALNAP as a maturing network has reached a point in its development when members begin to demand some tangible impact. This and the sector's frustration at its poor record of institutional change have led to greater pressure to deliver' (Reference 1, p ii). Such an expectation has also been identified in the Vision paper.

We can infer from this that there is a growing expectation that the high-value services provided by ALNAP are not enough by themselves. People want to see change in the system, and there is an expectation that an attributable link between ALNAP's work and humanitarian impact must be demonstrated. It is very important to address this concern thoughtfully at the outset.

The first issue concerns what we can reasonably expect to demonstrate, given the complexity of the challenge. It is worth reminding ourselves that the international humanitarian system is essentially the product of about 20 or so Northern donor governments, the Red Cross Movement, the United Nations and many thousands of NGOs – all costing about US\$6 billion every year. It is a multifaceted and complex enterprise of which ALNAP is a very small part indeed. In terms of cost, about 0.01 per cent of humanitarian aid is spent by ALNAP. Moreover, humanitarian action is increasingly interwoven with activities undertaken by the development community, the military, the private sector, the human-rights community and others. And this makes it even more complicated to attribute actions emanating from one thing to an end result made up of so many things. It is not that surprising therefore that ALNAP's RHA regularly bemoans the fact that impact assessment in humanitarian action is rarely (if ever) undertaken. As a result, many people will understandably feel that it is not reasonable or possible to assess the effect of ALNAP's activities beyond the level of outputs.

So, are there other ways of addressing this problem? One way is to build on the fact that ALNAP shares a common goal with many other organisations having overlapping membership and approaches. The idea of assessing impact seems more attainable if a generic rather than a specific approach is taken. In other words, it may be possible to monitor and assess the cumulative effects of all the related initiatives that have emerged since the JEEAR, rather than just the impact of a single initiative. Already,

ALNAP and several other agencies and initiatives (loosely called ‘the quality initiatives’) come together twice a year to share information and to help create bilateral cooperation. This could provide an opportunity to develop a joint strategy that would optimise our collective impact on improving quality and performance.

It may be a good idea to propose that part of this strategy could be to develop common proxy indicators of impact. A collective approach is likely to have a better chance of providing a meaningful indication of impact, rather than looking at each initiative independently. Therefore, some of the future challenges may be about finding new synergies, harmonising workplans and developing a common monitoring system for ‘quality’.

References

1. Valid International (2004) *Evaluation of the Department for International Development Support to ALNAP*. 29 December (<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/aboutdfid/performance/files/aclearnnet.pdf>).
2. House of Commons International Development Committee (2006) *Humanitarian Response to Natural Disasters*. Seventh Report of Session 2005–06, Volume 2 (<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmintdev/1188/1188i.pdf>).

Annexe A: List of ALNAP Full Members

AHA	MFA France
AIDMI	MFA Germany
AusAID	MFA Netherlands
Borton, John	MSF-Holland
British Red Cross	NORAD
CARE International	Norwegian Refugee Council
Caritas Internationalis/CAFOD	OCHA
Christian Aid	ODI
Christoplos, Ian	OHCHR
CIDA	OXFAM
CRS	People in Aid
DANIDA	ProVention Consortium
Danish Refugee Council	RedR-IHE
DARA	Save the Children UK
DFID	Save the Children US
ECHO	SCHR
ETCUK Ltd	SDC
FAO	Sida
GICHD	SPHERE
Groupe URD	Telford, John
HAP International	Tufts University
ICRC	UNDP
ICVA	UNHCR
IFRC	UNICEF
IRC	USAID/OFDA
Irish Aid	VOICE
JICA	WFP
MFA Belgium	WHO
	World Vision International

Annex B: 'The Vision for ALNAP'



The Vision for ALNAP

February 2002

Introduction

The ‘Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action’ was conceived in 1996 as a result of discussions at international fora and concept design work commissioned by DFID from an ODI Research Fellow. It was formally established in 1997 as an ODI project with DFID funding. ALNAP was created to provide a sectorwide forum, owned by all and dominated by none, through which to address learning, accountability and quality issues of sectorwide concern. It encompasses a full representation of the types of organisation that form the humanitarian sector, seeking to meet their needs and the needs of those therein responsible for policy, operations, learning and accountability.

ALNAP’s Statement of Purpose¹:

ALNAP, as a unique sectorwide active-learning membership network, is dedicated to improving the accountability and quality of humanitarian action, by sharing lessons; identifying common problems; and, where appropriate, building consensus on approaches.

ALNAP now has 50 Full Members, 287 Observers, and an elected Steering Committee of 8 Full Member representatives. The ALNAP Secretariat is hosted by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) as an ALNAP Full Member-funded ODI project. It is the Full Members who, through a process of debate and prioritisation, determine ALNAP’s activities.

Five years on from its inception *The Vision for ALNAP* seeks to articulate a shared concept, provide clarity of ownership and purpose, and provide a reference point against which to gauge progress. This document sets out the general parameters to guide the development of ALNAP over the next three years.

Context and ALNAP’s Rationale

ALNAP’s existence reflects a sectorwide desire to improve performance in humanitarian action, and recognition that:

- this requires sectorwide change as well as change within individual organisations;
- existing mechanisms are not sufficientl inclusive to facilitate sectorwide change;
- individual organisations will benefit from a sharing of perspectives and experiences in their efforts to improve active learning, accountability and quality within the sector.

¹ Revisited for the first time since ALNAP’s inception in 1997, no substantive changes have been made to the original Statement of Purpose.

As more organisations recognise the need to improve performance at all levels, the environment becomes more conducive to new thinking and approaches, as demonstrated by the development of related initiatives (eg, The Sphere Project, Humanitarian Accountability Project and the Quality Platform). This evolving context requires a sharper definition of ALNAP's niche and role therein.

While ALNAP's member groupings (UN, bilateral donors, Red Cross Movement and NGOs) have their own mechanisms for cooperation, ALNAP provides the only inclusive, standing forum fostering active learning and exchange on good practice. The need for such a forum will persist for as long as there is room for dialogue and improvement. It is anticipated that the ALNAP Secretariat will remain within the Overseas Development Institute for the period covered by this Vision paper.

Framing the Vision

As a Membership Network, ALNAP's vision for the humanitarian sector is rooted in that of its Full Members. The following attempts to formulate that shared vision, based on Full Members' input:

The humanitarian sector is a network of international, national and local organisations that respond collectively to humanitarian needs by providing assistance and protection to save life, reduce suffering and preserve or re-establish the livelihoods of the affected populations. Our vision for the humanitarian sector is that it:

- Forms part of coherent wider strategies aimed at reducing the need for international humanitarian action, eg through conflict prevention, vulnerability reduction, and disaster prevention and preparedness, etc
- Enjoys high levels of collaboration between organisations
- Seeks to build the capacity of national and local organisations during the response
- Ensures that the beneficiaries and/or the affected populations are involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of the interventions
- Operates in a transparent and accountable manner
- Works to achieve continuous improvement in performance through investment in actively learning from our own experience and sharing the experiences of others
- Views staff as a key resource and invests appropriately in their development/support
- Mobilises sufficient resources to enable it to respond appropriately, effectively and proportionately to all humanitarian needs without regard to race, religion or politics

In the context of these shared goals *The Vision for ALNAP* as a forum where diversity of approach can be expressed and innovative approaches shared is that:

ALNAP foster a culture of active learning, accountability and quality throughout the sector to facilitate improved performance.

Requirements for Achieving the Vision

Achieving ALNAP's Vision will require:

1. ALNAP members as pro-active, engaged, co-owners
2. Activities with added value and sectorwide and key-group relevance
3. Demonstrable impact on accountability and quality within the humanitarian sector
4. Sectorwide inclusivity and a balance of representation
5. Appropriate resourcing to meet approved activities
6. A strong and clear communication and marketing strategy

1. ALNAP Members as pro-active, engaged, co-owners To maximise the impact of ALNAP's activities, Full Members and their representatives need to pro-actively engage as supporters, disseminators, promoters and ambassadors, within their own organisations, networks and the sector as a whole.

2. Activities with added value and sectorwide and key-group relevance Support for ALNAP relies on it undertaking activities² that are additional or add value to those of its Members and others. The broad nature of the ALNAP collective combined with its procedures for identifying and prioritising ALNAP activities avoids much of the risks of duplication and overlap. However, increased activity within the humanitarian sector on issues of quality and accountability requires an increased awareness and sharing of intelligence, whether Members' in-house activities or those of others.

Sectorwide impact will be facilitated by identifying and addressing the needs of the key groups within the sector. ALNAP must cater not only for the needs of the different types of organisation (Red Cross Movement, UN, Multilateral and Bilateral Donors, NGOs, Research Institutions and Consultants), but also for their constituent parts – ie those responsible for:

- i) developing and interpreting policy
- ii) designing and managing operational interventions/programmes
- iii) organisational learning (including evaluation)
- iv) accountability (including evaluation, governance and external scrutiny).

Their needs will be addressed by ensuring their representation within ALNAP; relevant ALNAP activities; and, targeted dissemination of key ALNAP messages.

3. Demonstrable impact on quality and accountability in the humanitarian sector ALNAP needs to develop monitoring and evaluative mechanisms to allow members to demonstrate their impact on sectorwide quality and accountability and hence ALNAP's added value.

² ALNAP currently has three areas of activity: 'Network' 'Programme' and 'Interest Group' activities, with 'Network Activities' at its core. 'Network' activities include all information exchange activities, central to which are the ALNAP Full Member Biannual meetings and the 'Annual Review Series'. 'Programme' activities include ALNAP commissioned research on key issues for the sector. 'Interest Group' activities allow proposals developed within ALNAP to go forward under the funding and leadership of a small group of its members with minimal support from the ALNAP Secretariat.

4. Sectorwide inclusivity, and balanced representation ALNAP's self-imposed ceiling of 50 Full Members limits inclusivity and potential for impact. It must explore how the desire for intimacy and familiarity can be squared with the need for greater inclusivity.

ALNAP's effectiveness will depend on an adequate level of seniority, as well as a balance of representation. It must increase its ability to 'reach up' within Full Member organisations.

ALNAP needs to:

- raise Full Member numbers, while ensuring intimacy and familiarity are not unduly affected;
- increase representation of 'southern' organisations in the membership;
- review the composition of Member representatives to ensure key groups are engaged;
- increase engagement of senior personnel at Biannual meetings and in activities;
- increase engagement of ALNAP Observer Members³ as a key ALNAP asset;
- strengthen links with other influential organisations.

5. Resourcing appropriate to implement approved activities To ensure ALNAP is able to implement Full Member approved workplans:

- ALNAP workplans and activities need to be realistically budgeted;
- Full Members need to provide sufficient resources ahead of the activity being undertaken;
- the Secretariat capacity should be regularly reviewed and adjusted to ensure it remains appropriate to the demands of approved activities.

6. A strong and clear communication and marketing strategy To ensure ALNAP's key messages are heard and products disseminated throughout the humanitarian sector, ALNAP needs to develop a communication strategy which takes account of the needs of its constituent parts, key groups therein and wider audiences.

Annex 1. ALNAP's Key Target Groups

The four groups identified are those with responsibility for and engaged in:

1. Development and interpretation of policy
2. Design and management of operational interventions and programmes
3. Organisational learning (including evaluation)
4. Accountability (including evaluation, governance and external scrutiny)

The needs of these four groups differ in terms of their subject interest with inevitable areas of overlap, inviting diversity of approach. Strategies adopted to meet the needs

³ The role of Observer Members as a key ALNAP Networking resource highly representative of the key target groups has been sorely neglected to date and should be explored and developed not just in relation to inclusivity, but also in relation to ALNAP's Communication strategy.

of each group will be guided by ALNAP's Statement of Purpose. ALNAP should ensure that the implications of activity findings for each group are explicitly drawn out and broadly disseminated.

1. Policy Makers

Primarily HQ-based, their needs include the synthesised results of evaluations and learning exercises, and the sharing of experience on initiatives on improving quality and accountability at an organisational level. Both can be met within ALNAP's mandate.

2. Operational Personnel

Primarily based at the regional and country level, although the group also includes geographical desk and humanitarian section personnel at the HQ level. While most are personnel of NGO, Red Cross and UN agencies, some are personnel of bilateral donor organisations as a result of the increased involvement of donor organisations in direct operations. Their needs include the sharing of good practice, practical guidance and training on approaches to improving quality and performance at the operational level, particularly in relation to programme design, monitoring and reporting.

3. Organisational Learning Group

A growing group that includes those engaged in supporting organisational learning and its potential value to their organisation. The group covers all types of organisations, cuts across organisational structures, and includes those responsible for and engaged in the evaluation of humanitarian action from a learning perspective. The needs of the organisational learning group are primarily that of sharing experience, and identifying effective learning models and approaches.

4. Accountability Group

This group includes the Boards, Executive Committees and Trustees of UN agencies, NGOs and the Red Cross Movement, as well as Parliamentary/Congressional scrutiny bodies and national audit offices. It is potentially influential in terms of the attention given to quality and accountability issues within humanitarian organisations. This group, although not explicitly excluded, is not currently represented at the ALNAP table. It is envisaged that it will be targeted with key ALNAP messages and products as part of ALNAP's developing Communication Strategy. As with the Organisational Learning Group, the Accountability Group includes those responsible for and engaged in the evaluation of humanitarian action.

Many humanitarian organisations rely on consultants and academics to undertake studies and advise them on approaches to issues of quality and accountability. It is they that often bring beneficiary perspectives to the fore, promoting downward accountability. Consequently they represent an influential group in relation to the humanitarian sector. This group's needs include access to key documents and useful texts, the sharing of experiences and approaches and training on those areas, which are beyond their normal expertise.