

Concept note for Day 1 of ALNAP's 21st Biannual June 6th 2007

To be held at the head office of Groupe URD, La Fontaine des Marins, 26170 Plaisians, France

Theme :

The meeting will discuss changes in the humanitarian sector over recent years; look at how far performance has improved; take stock of how *quality and accountability Initiatives* have been contributing to these changes; and look at how to work towards future improvements, focussing particularly on the future roles and activities of ALNAP.

Background :

There has been a proliferation of organisations, institutions and Initiatives that take the quality and accountability of humanitarian performance as all or part of their purpose; our hosts, Groupe URD, are of course amongst these.

This year, 2007, is 10 years since ALNAP's founding. It is also approximately 10 years since the inception of the Sphere Project and People In Aid, and since the start of the Ombudsman Project which was the precursor to the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership - International (HAP). This is of course, no coincidence since all of these Initiatives arose more or less directly as parts of the reaction of the humanitarian system to the Joint Evaluation of the Emergency Assistance to Rwanda; those events and that evaluation were the theme of ALNAP's 15th Biannual, held in Copenhagen in 2004. Good Humanitarian Donorship is more recent, but arguably has its origins from the same period. These and others are referred to collectively as quality and accountability initiatives.

Programme

The day will start with a **plenary session**. We hope to have a set of presentations from people who were instrumental in founding or starting some of the Initiatives, reminding us of the reasons they were set up and what the aspirations were for them at that point. They will also reflect on whether those hopes have been realised and whether other achievements have come out of them.

The presentations will be followed, again in plenary, by a chance for all participants to make their comments, ask questions, and discuss what the picture is now: how far do the various Initiatives contribute to improving the performance of humanitarian actors and how can they do more and better?

Workshops

The meeting will then break down into discussion workshops. It is proposed that there should be 5 workshops :

- *Learning in order to improve performance*

We tend to assume that we both know what learning is and what the relationship is between the lessons that we identify and improvement in performance. However we also know that the way that lessons are formulated, the ways that people and organisations learn, and the relationships between learning and changing behaviour are all far from simple or uniform. Participants will try to identify key elements for ALNAP to take account of in supporting learning, particularly at the field-level, and activities we could undertake to influence wide-ranging positive change in performance. (Note : *RHA in 2003* chapter on 'Field level learning' as a reference.)

- *The role of evaluation in learning, change and improving performance*

Evaluation has a key position in our strategies for influencing positive change; it has always had a central role in ALNAP, which has tried to encourage both more and better quality evaluations. As the chapter on the utilisation of evaluations in the last RHA argues, doing evaluations alone is not enough, and evaluation may be best thought of as one part of the learning strategy for change. Participants will try to identify key elements for ALNAP's future promotion of evaluation as tool for influencing improvement in performance.

- *Learning and its role in how organisational change happens*

In order to influence practice and bring about change, it is important to understand how change happens in organisations, and to look at the role of what we call 'learning' in bringing it about. Participants will share experiences of change being brought about or blocked, and try to propose how ALNAP, and the other Initiatives, can bring influence to bear to encourage positive change in organisations in the light of this understanding. (Note : *AR 2002* chapter on 'Improving performance through improved learning' as reference.)

- *How is the humanitarian 'system' put together and how does it learn?*

All of the Q & A Initiatives seek to influence not just individual organisations but the behaviour of the overall international system in acting in response to humanitarian need. We expect the learning process to either catalyse or influence change in the system as well as in individuals or organisations. Participants will address the nature of the system and the implications of that nature for the place and role of ALNAP, as a network specifically interested in learning, and the other Initiatives in shaping and influencing it.

- *Accountability as a key element in driving positive change*

Accountability is at the heart of ALNAP and most of the other Initiatives. But there is no uncontested understanding of what it actually is and how fostering it will in fact drive change. Participants will discuss how parts of the accountability agenda work for and against positive change, and propose to ALNAP what roles and activities it should concentrate its efforts on.

The final session of the day will be another **plenary**. Designated rapporteurs will bring back a few of the key ideas from each workshop to the whole meeting.