# Evaluation Capacities and Systems: A New ALNAP Initiative

**Update for ALNAP Steering Committee meeting 8th September 2009**

## Background/Rationale

Building evaluation capacity involves *“working intentionally and continuously to create and sustain overall organisational processes that make quality evaluation and its uses routine”* (Baizerman, Compton and Stockdill 2005:39).

This initiative is concerned with developing evaluation capacityin the humanitarian sector. Organisational evaluation capacity is a, if not *the,* critical missing factor in current efforts to improve the accountability and performance in the humanitarian sector. Failure to recognise this has arguably led to an overemphasis in the sector on building the capacities of individual evaluators, evaluation managers and other staff in evaluation units, rather than on improving the quality of the organisational and institutional settings in which they work and/or designing evaluation strategies that are best suited to those settings.

Thus far, ALNAP’s efforts to promote the quality and use of evaluations have focused to a large extent on the strengths and weaknesses of discrete evaluation processes and reports. ALNAP has commissioned and produced meta-evaluations, which assessed the quality of selected evaluation reports (ALNAP 2001 onwards) and best practice guides on evaluation of humanitarian action (Hallam, 1998; Beck, 2005). Similarly, the wider humanitarian and development sectors’ capacity building efforts have focused on technical training or skill building of individuals (OECD, 2006).

However, a growing body of literature and discussion on evaluation capacity development has highlighted the need to better understand the organisational and institutional factors that can operate in spite of individual capacities and skills to weaken the evaluation function (OECD DAC, 2006; Baker and Bruner, 2007; Mayne, 2008; Patton, 2008; IEG, 2009; Heider, 2009). As Patton notes, building and sustaining evaluation capacity within an organisation means integrating evaluation into an organisation’s culture (2008). This goes beyond a focus on how discrete evaluations are conducted or used. It takes us into the arena of organisational cultures and structures, looking at how decision makers and staff integrate evaluation into their wider organisational functions and activities.

Moreover, across the ALNAP membership there is growing realisation that evaluation strategies are evolving, partly in response to internal organisational issues and partly in response to wider political trends. New strategies, approaches and methods for evaluation and learning are being adopted, demonstrated by growing numbers of real time and internal, self-evaluations. Questions about the implications of particular organisational policies, structures and incentives for evaluation management, implementation and use, as well as about how to sustain evaluation capacity over time, are being posed.

Against this background, this initiative seeks to support ALNAP Full Member organisations (including bilateral donors, UN agencies, NGOs and the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement) in developing their evaluation capacities. As capacity development is necessarily an endogenous process, ALNAP is best placed to do this through facilitating dialogue and knowledge sharing within and between its Full Member agencies about their efforts to develop evaluation capacities, what the key issues and challenges are and the extent to which these are a product of organisational and institutional arrangements.

## Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of this initiative is to assist ALNAP Full Member organisations (including UN agencies, Donors, NGOs and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement) to develop their evaluation capacities in order to improve learning, accountability and performance in the humanitarian sector.

**Specific objectives include:**

* To improve understanding of the diverse range of evaluation systems and ‘cultures’ among ALNAP Full Member organisations (including UN agencies, Donors, NGOs and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement) and how these promote or undermine evaluation capacities.
* To facilitate inter- and intra-organisational learning and knowledge sharing about the main issues and challenges facing organisations attempting to develop their evaluation capacities, and how these might be overcome.
* To support the identification and setting of priorities for future efforts by ALNAP Full member organisations to develop evaluation capacities.

## Research Methods

1. **Review of published and ‘grey’ literature.** Published literature on evaluation capacity development currently blends several fields including evaluation theory, capacity development, organisational learning and performance management. This literature, including definitions and frameworks for understanding and analysing evaluation capacity, will be reviewed. In particular, Mayne’s suggestion that evaluation capacity is best achieved through the development of an ‘evaluation culture’ (2008) will be explored. Lessons from the OECD-DAC/UNEG Peer Reviews of the Evaluation Function in UN agencies, as well as ‘grey’ literature including evaluation policies, strategies and reports will also be reviewed. The end product will be a background paper which explores some of the main issues and challenges faced by organisations in the humanitarian sector attempting to develop evaluation capacity. It will not be a “how to” guide on developing evaluation capacity, nor will it attempt to identify best practices.
2. **Development of an organisational self-assessment tool.** Drawing on the research carried out for the background paper, an organisational self-assessment tool will be developed to assist organisations to reflect on and assess their own evaluation systems and ‘cultures’ and the extent to which these promote or hinder evaluation capacity.
3. **Series of single- and multi-organisation workshops to facilitate dialogue and knowledge-sharing within and between ALNAP Full Member organisations.** Once the organisational self-assessment tool has been developed, the ALNAP secretariat will host a series of workshops with interested organisations to facilitate reflection and intra-organisational knowledge sharing about evaluation systems and ‘culture’, and how these promote or hinder evaluation capacity. Participants would include executive directors, representatives from upper and mid level management, HQ and operational staff, representatives from the board of directors and others as appropriate. The workshops would provide an opportunity for participating organisations to:
   1. Bring staff together to clarify and share knowledge about the strengths and weaknesses of their evaluation systems and ‘culture’ and how these influence evaluation capacities.
   2. Identify and set priorities for future efforts to strengthen evaluation capacities.

At a later stage, a multi-agency workshop could be arranged at which all participating organisations would come together to share knowledge gained and lessons learned.

## Update

To date, 16 interviews have been conducted with key informants including representatives of UN agencies, bi-lateral donors, NGOs, Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and academic institutions, as well as independent evaluators, to establish evaluation-related needs and sound out/fine tune the concept and approach outlined above.

There is widespread support for the initiative and, in particular, for facilitated knowledge-sharing within and between agencies on evaluation capacities and systems, which is perceived to be lacking. Already, DEC, WFP, Oxfam UK, BRCS, ECHO and DFID have expressed an interest in participating in workshops.

The literature review and development of the organisational evaluation capacity self-assessment tool have begun and are currently ongoing.

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