

OPERATIONAL HUMANITARIAN DECISION-MAKING



Info Sheet | April 2018



ALNAP is undertaking a new piece of research to better understand how humanitarians can make effective decisions in situations of urgency and/or uncertainty.

Why study humanitarian decision-making?

Decision-making is an important, yet often criticised, aspect of effective humanitarian response. Evaluations point to numerous instances where decision-making has been slow, opaque and unaccountable. The importance of good decision-making has also emerged as a significant theme in ALNAP's previous work on humanitarian leadership and coordination.

Despite this, relatively little academic attention has been given to decision-making in humanitarian response. The work that does exist has identified particular gaps in our knowledge of:

- the types of decisions that decisions are made, by whom and how,
- the extent to which the types of decisions made differ during a response
- the conditions in which decisions are made
- the influence these conditions have on the decision-making process

The first part of this research initiative consisted of a literature review. The review identified two particular research gaps:

- The need to better understand the range and nature of decisions made during humanitarian response
- A clearer case for which decision-making approaches are more effective in varying states of uncertainty and urgency

What questions will this research answer?

This research aims to:

Better understand the nature of humanitarian contexts, and humanitarian decisions

- How much urgency/uncertainty exists in the context?
- Are decisionmakers facing stress?
- What decisions are humanitarians making?
- What are the factors that decision-makers have to consider?
- How do humanitarian contexts influence decision-making processes?

Better understand the nature of humanitarian decision-making processes

- What approaches are being used?
- How effective are these decisions?
- Which approaches to humanitarian decision-making are most effective?

What approach will this research take?

Following the scoping literature review, ALNAP is now conducting research which will result in a study. The research will include:

- A diary and interview based method where individual decision-makers will record details about specific decisions, the contexts they were made within, and the approach used. An app will be used to record diary entries, which will be followed by interviews.
- May also include a scenario workshop, which tests hypotheses generated during the scoping and diary/interview phases, about the use of different decision-making approaches.

How can ALNAP members get involved?

ALNAP is looking for organisations with an interest in better humanitarian decision-making to partner with us in this research initiative. Research partners will join the advisory group for this work, encourage their staff to participate in the research, share relevant documents and their own experiences with the topic, and – potentially - host meetings and workshops. In return, partner organisations will contribute to shaping the research throughout the process, have the opportunity to participate in all ALNAP workshops and events that fall within this research process, and access opportunities for their in-country leadership to individually benefit from its findings, through coaching and workshop opportunities.

There are also opportunities to contribute to the research in a smaller role, by sharing relevant documents and experience with the research team as well as hosting or participating in a meeting or workshop.

For further information....

If you would like further information about this research or would like to get involved, please contact Senior Research Officer Leah Campbell at l.campbell@alnap.org.

